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Bank Lane, London EC4A
3DF. Printed and
published by the
Times Newspapers Ltd,
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of *Daniel Deronda*, a text highly prized by semioticians, is determined in a rather similar way. Deronda saves a poor Jewish girl, develops an intense interest in the culture of the Jews, and is accepted by them as a kindred spirit. Then he finds out that he actually is a Jew. The author wants the story both ways. On the one hand his commitment must have the freedom of moral choice, otherwise the tale would lack the high-minded force of its specification; on the other, he has to be a Jew in order to become one. Culler finds this double logic a paradigm of every good narrative; an apparently free sequence of facts or events is also predetermined by the needs of the thematic structure. We find out what happened because it was necessary that it should have happened. Stand this awareness on its head and you get something like *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, where the reader is apparently offered a choice between two sequences of event, both of which are in fact predetermined by the plan of the novel.

We have here an obvious truth that is also a tautology; of course the events in a tale occur because the teller has willed them. But the sin of semiotics is to attempt to destroy our sense of the truth in fiction. There must be in it, as Marianne Moore said of poems, "a place for the genuine". Imaginary gardens with real toads in them. Fiction must lose its nerve if those toads are signs like the story, and as subject to the story-teller's whim. And the reader will lose his interest, for he will not believe the fiction if he cannot accept the fact, or if he is told that the fact is merely a part of the fiction. This happens more and more today in "factual" novels like the recent concoction of Truman Capote, and may make us feel that a very much more important distinction for a fiction than the formalist one of Story and Discourse is the difference between what is true in it and what is made up.

In a good story, truth precedes fiction and remains separable from it. The fiction is manipulated by the author in any way convenient, but what is inside it must begin and remain true. The truth about Baker Street and the pair of friends who live there both precedes and enhances the fantasy of the Sherlock Holmes adventures. The success of *The Wind in the Willows* depends on the real human nature of the fantasy animals. This is a cliché, but the insistence of semiotic theorists on a tautology makes it worth emphasizing. Its importance is taken for granted by Hardy and Dickens when they take very seriously the question of how they should have ended their novels — *Great Expectations*, *The Return of the Native*, *The Woodlanders*. The ending must not be predetermined by the requirements of the novel but must be true to the characters and their situation. Fiction must not only defer to truth but must recognize its own status in regard to it. It is a bad thing, said Tolstoy, when characters are made to do what is not in their nature. But in the critical philosophy of today the novelist owns truth and nature as much as he owns his fictions.

It is easy to give examples of this. Criticism used to point out the kinds of truth that fiction contained. In his notes on Shakespeare's plays, Johnson thought it worthwhile to chide the playgoers of his time for finding it implausible and arbitrary that Othello and Desdemona should be made to fall in love. "Whoever ridicules this account of the progress of love shows his ignorance not only of history but of nature and manners." But it would be irrelevant to ask whether the love of the French Lieutenant's woman is true in the same sense that Desdemona's is. Like the author's Victorian history she is a part of the fiction, and will behave in any way that is consonant with it. In Malcolm Bradbury's novel *The History Man* it is clearly not "true" that the studious English

teacher would succumb instantly to the hero's advances, but the author requires him to seduce her and that is the end of the matter. In the many reviews of the novel there was no suggestion that the author was at any point being untrue to "nature and manners".

The ways in which this theory of literature removes the truth/fiction distinction seem to me crucial. Semiotics probably has nothing against truth as such but does not consider it an appropriate concept for the scrutiny and discussion of literary effect. Literature, Culler suggests, should be read not in terms of truth and invention but of "act", acts of "persuasion, narrative, trope, rhetoric". The strategies of semiotics and deconstruction are also those that "Nietzsche employed in his analyses of cause and effect as a metonymy, of truth as metaphor, whose metaphoricality has been forgotten, and of the identity principle as a rhetorical imposition, a synecdoche". The nature of things and people is translated into a verbal terminology, where by implication it is no longer responsible to its counterpart in experience.

So in theory, at least, Culler is right that "poetics" and "interpretation" are two different things, for the latter depends on a continual appeal to experience, to direct impressions of life made visible in literature. The worst service that semiotics has done is not to our appreciation of literature, to which it can be a useful adjunct, but to literature itself. It cannot harm past literature but it can and does contaminate our present literary environment. A creative writer unconsciously must be in a bad way. Such a writer might reply that at the present time we do not know what is "true" any more, and that he expresses this by making up a sign language that defers only to others like it. But that is hardly a convincing defence.



Utrillo's painting in oil on wood of "Le Clown Charley Mayer" (1926) is one of 125 illustrations, including forty-eight colour plates, in the magnificently produced Utrillo (159pp. Thames and Hudson. £16. 0 500 09151 X) which includes an analysis of this tragic, alcoholic painter's work by Alfred Werner.

The positional style

By Keith Walker

ERIC ROTHSTEIN:
Restoration and Eighteenth-century
Poetry 1660-1780
242pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
£15.95
0 7100 0660 8

The greatest and most entertaining history of Restoration and eighteenth-century poetry was the first — Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the English Poets* with which this third volume of the Routledge History of English Poetry only occasionally suggests points of comparison and contrast. Of Dryden, Johnson wrote "in 1757 he published *The Fleecy*, his greatest poetical work, of which I will not suppress a ludicrous story which serves this sort of thing, where will it end? Rothstein realizes the danger: "Unfortunately, Bagley and . . . *Ode on the Present State of English Poetry* . . . do not bear quoting: Schomberg is so accurate [in his parodies] that the lines are no funnier, at least in short extracts; than a very bad poem by one of the mocked poets would be." Not that Rothstein doesn't have a nice eye for the absurd, quoting James Grainger's praise of the "lofty cassia", whose "long pods, full fraught with nectared sweets, / Relieve the bowels from their lagging load".

His purpose is not to entertain, but to provide a proper frame for a sympathetic, or at least intelligent, reading of poetry of the period 1660-1780. The dense, rather severe prose, bristling with direction posts (some of which we're warned not to take too seriously) and intermittently enlivened by metaphors from cooking, suggests that Rothstein has an audience of his fellow scholars in mind. There are few enthusiasms evident beyond those for Prior's *Alma*, and the poems of Mac-

In the central chapter on "Style", Rothstein puts forward the view that we should read this largely unmetaphorical body of verse as an example of "positional style" (this linguistic placing of an object within a context). This approach, and his analyses along this line, makes us alert to such relationships as those between poem, speaker, perceiver and perceived objects, and also to those between poem and tradition. A

ANDREA DWORCKIN:

Pornography
Men Possessing Women
304pp. The Women's Press. £4.75.
0 7043 3876 9

SUSAN GRIFFIN:

Pornography and Silence
Culture's Revenge Against Nature
277pp. The Women's Press. £4.75.
0 7043 3877 7

A male reader is bound to feel at a loss on tackling these two products of the American Women's Liberation Movement. They are clearly not addressed to a male audience, and especially not to the average, liberal English male who, for as long as he can remember, has been familiar with, and sympathetic to, the cause of women's rights. They make no pretence of being objective analyses of the modern phenomenon of commercial pornography. They are rallying calls or war-cries intended only for other women. Their authors are Amazons or female chauvinists. If women, who after all are said to be in the majority, were to respond to their urgent plea, men would sooner or later be bred only on a quota system, for the replenishment of the sperm-bank. And this would be simple justice, because men have wrongly dominated culture from the beginning, men are tyrants, men are all examples of sheer, amoral sex-drive, men understand neither women nor themselves, men are destroying the world; men, by implication, do not deserve to exist.

True, commercialized pornography is a dubious development, and things in general can always be said to be bad, but why should men, as men, be attacked with such vehemence at this stage? Female emancipation has been in progress for at least a century in Europe. In England, the mutation towards a classless society as between men and women — in so far as it is feasible, given their statistically different propensities — is surely well advanced, when we have a woman Prime Minister, women in all the professions, and laws against sexual discrimination. America must be lagging far behind, if these two writers do, the position of women to that of the Blacks in the ghettos and the Jews under Hitler. Bewilderingly, Women, Negroes and the Holocaust are treated in these books as a sort of trinity of victimization. And the volumes are brought out in this country, as if they were appropriate to Britain, by the Women's Press of Shoreditch High Street, an institution in which, however, I would have little confidence if I were a woman, because of the surprising ineptness of the symbol at its masthead. This is a crude drawing of an electric stave iron hanging over a very crumpled garment on an ironing-board, with the motto: "Steaming Ahead". Little promise of liberation here, I should have thought, since the steam in a steam-iron is a dampening-agent not a driving-force, and in any case the iron is anchored to the wall-plug. The choice of this tattered domestic utensil must represent a subconscious relapse into automatic feminine acceptance of household chores, an attitude long out of date in many English homes.

Although the two volumes read, for the most part, like a double version of the same book, there is a difference, of emphasis between them. Andrea Dworckin is the more aggressive of the two writers, and she has a rather simpler view of the Male, whom she sees as pure sexual drive, coupled with an evil thirst for violence and domination. Here are some astonishing, but representative, quotations:

Adult men tend not to rape their own sons or close male relations, so as not to risk rape from them. . . . Sexual violence against women and girls is sanctioned and encouraged for a purpose: the active and persistent channeling of male sexual aggression against females protects men and boys rather effectively from male sexual abuse.

In the intimate world of men and women, there is no mid-twentieth century distinct from any other century. There are only the old values, women there for the taking, the means of taking determined by the male.

In the main, the abominable She is held responsible for everything bad, fearful or alienating that ever happened to the fully-human-He . . .

In adoring violence — from the crucifixion of Christ to the cinematic portrayal of General Patton — men seek to adore themselves. . . . After some two hundred pages in this style, and in which pornography and real life are assumed to be exactly on the same level, Ms Dworckin concludes that women will be free only when pornography has been abolished but, strangely enough, she makes no suggestion about how this is to be accomplished. Her final paragraph is an apocalyptic vision, in which, however, men are suddenly and unexpectedly referred to as "the boys", as if this mock-jovial term could at least push them back verbally into the relative innocence of prepuberty:

The boys are betting that we cannot face the horrors of their sexual system and survive. The boys are betting that their depiction of us as whores will beat us down and stop our hearts. The boys are betting that their penises and fists and knives and fucks and rapes will turn us into what they say we are — the compliant women of sex, the masochistic sluts who resist because we really want more. The boys are betting. The boys are wrong.

Well, I hope we boys have a clearer idea than that of what we are up to; we cannot both stop the hearts of our whipping-girls and continue to get sun out of them.

Susan Griffin is just as gratuitously dogmatic in her generalizations as Ms Dworckin. For instance, she makes the astounding remark that "we can find no living culture today" which does not express a profound hatred of the bodies of women, and a fear of human nature and human life. But she is more subtle in suggesting that men hate women firstly because of the feminine element within themselves, which culture has taught them to repress, and secondly because the female body reminds them of their links with the animal world, a connection which both fascinates and repels them: ". . . a woman's body becomes the symbol in which contain all that a man finds soiled by bestiality in himself." Men, having got their wires crossed in this way, seek an outlet in violence; in their slink minds " . . . the hope of a marriage

outlet in violence; in their sick minds . . . the hope of a marriage between spirit and flesh is replaced by a longing for death."

Women have too long been silent in face of this horror. They should speak out in favour of "eros", a term which Ms Griffin seems to take in the broad sense of spiritual love combined with a proper understanding of the physical. But it is not clear to the male reader that he will have any role to play in the erotic Utopia she vaguely adumbrates. Towards the end, her Amazonianism shades off tantalizingly into the ineffable insane:

Culture is part of nature; we who are born of nature, who are nature, want to know nature. We are singers. And the world is a resonant place. Yes, the singer is afraid of the song, as we are afraid of Eros, for within Eros is annihilation. But the song will not be silent.

Although I can agree, here and there, with certain statements contained in these books, I confess to being unable to make any overall sense of them. My main complaint is that they persistently confuse two themes which, while obviously interrelated, are better considered apart: pornography and real-life sexual relations.

The widespread commercial development of pornography, in books, photographic magazines, films and now video-cassettes, is a very recent phenomenon, and a consequence of sexual liberation working on the open market and taking advantage of modern equipment. In former periods, pornography was, for the most part, clandestine and confined to the socially privileged. In Victorian times, there were, presumably, a great many prostitutes on the London streets but no naughty magazines publicly on sale as now. It is arguably better to have nude images available on the bookshelves, whatever use the purchasers make of them, rather than impoverished, diseased females touting on the pavements.

But this only moves the problem one stage back. Are the women photographed for the porn trade, or on display in the nude shows and blue films, not being as cruelly victimized as their Victorian predecessors? Dworckin and Griffin assume that they are, but I doubt it. The great majority of them look extremely attractive and healthy — very different, for instance, from the wretched creatures in the terrible pornography emanating from the Third World — and so they must be choosing to sell themselves in this way, instead of, or in addition to, earning their living in more modest occupations. The same is no doubt true of the young men in the blue films, or in the gay maga-

zines and the centre-spreads of certain women's papers.

It is a question of individual freedom. Ms Griffin gives a would-be pathetic summary of Linda Lovelace's suffering at the hands of her pornographer-husband, but she neglects to explain why Linda, a middle-class girl with decent parents in the background, stayed with him so long, when he was so awful. It is not enough to say that women have been brain-washed by the prevailing male ethos, because that ethos began breaking down a century ago, and history shows that it was never absolute. Now, in the circumstances of modern Western Europe at least, and on the Lysistrata principle, women could put an end to pornography pictures at once by refusing to be photographed. The most depressing feature of the Dworckin and Griffin books is that their emotional force is not addressed positively to the inherent dignity of women, which might achieve that end; it is largely misdirected into a sterile, inter-female yammering against men.

It is also curious that Dworckin and Griffin should make no attempt to distinguish between the different kinds of pornography, and should ignore the fantasy function of all varieties. They take it for granted that all pornography is an insult to women, involves cruelty to women and is literally true. They quote a motley bunch of examples — books, magazines and actual case-histories of sexual crimes — but one cannot help noticing that they constantly return to certain purely verbal works, which might be termed "black classics": the writings of the Marquis de Sade, an eighteenth-century, aristocratic libertine, and two twentieth-century novellas, *L'Histoire d'O* by the pseudonymous "Pauline Réage" and *L'Histoire de Peol* by Georges Bataille. As a French specialist, I have had to read these books more than once in the line of duty, and I would put them firmly in the category of the pathological, by which I mean that they represent extreme hypertrophy of the sado-masochistic tensions which seem to be inseparable from all sex, but in most cases remain within reasonable bounds. Sade, a sado-masochistic bi-sexual, juggles with sex, torture, murder and scatological Réage offers a mystic expression of female immolation, and Bataille a variety of weird adventures linking sex and death. All three are no doubt highly significant from the medico-psychological point of view, but to imply that they are typical of the sexual attitudes and daily practice of *l'homme moyen sensuel* is about as plausible as asserting that all mothers of small children are baby-batterers.

It is true that some critics have praised these writers excitedly, and

Ms Griffin has a point when she singles out a particularly silly quotation about Sade in a book by the late Roland Barthes. But we are at liberty to disagree with the critics, and to consider the Sade cult, for instance, as a literary aberration requiring separate analysis — an aberration furthered, incidentally, by certain "liberated" women such as Susan Sontag and Angela Carter. Also, both Dworckin and Griffin overlook the significance of the fact that Sade was put in jail on a *lettre de cachet* solicited by his mother-in-law, and that he spent most of his life in confinement, which means that he was disowned by his male contemporaries.

At the dark end of the pornography market, there is a quantity of material repugnant to "normal" sensibilities. The psychiatrists disagree about whether it promotes acts of cruelty, or is an imaginative substitute for them, or can have either function in differing circumstances. Ms Dworckin defines all pornography as "Dachau in the bedroom", which is surely excessive.

On the evidence given to the Williams Committee, I would incline to the imaginative-substitute theory, and I suspect that Ms Griffin too exaggerates in asserting that Sade tortured "countless women". The police records, as I remember, indicate that he was a bungling, haphazard sadist. Nor have I ever heard it suggested that Jean Paulhan, the supposed author of *L'Histoire d'O*, or Georges Bataille, with whom I once spent a pleasant, civilized evening, did anything reprehensible in real life. Nevertheless, the books are, in my view, morbid symptoms, just as actual sadistic crimes, committed with or without the stimulus of such pornography, are obviously morbid phenomena.

I am not so sure of the serious morbidity of the glib magazines of the *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, *Fiesta*, etc. kind. Most of the images, while far below the erotic level of "The Rokeby Venus", correspond to crude male lust, the necessary animal love, and a universal principle before it teaches itself to the reality of any particular woman. They cannot do much harm to heterosexual relations, unless they induce certain men to prefer photographs and inflatable glamour-dolls to the flesh-and-blood females within their range. They might even help, since they are explicit enough to spare young men the surprises that certain Victorian gentlemen, such as Tennyson, experienced on their wedding-night. They certainly justify themselves, but that will be deplored only by those who believe in the romantic virtues of mystification. Ms Griffin's contention that they express hatred of the female body is incomprehensible to me. I would have thought that most men, willy-nilly, enjoy this optical prostitution, provided they do not suddenly find their nearest and dearest staring at them from the glossy pages, and are tickled by the dreams of inexhaustible potency in the accompanying texts. But, in a better society, such trashy products would not exist and, as I have said, women would not lend themselves to such an amoral industry. In the meantime, the difficulty is to decide which repressive measures would not do more harm than good — a practical problem that Dworckin and Griffin completely ignore.

It is not certain that the abolition of pornography would, in itself, make a fundamental difference. If the relationship between the sexes has always been wrong, as our authors imply, the commercial proliferation of pornography is only a contemporary symptom of a long-standing malady. When Stone Age man dragged his woman round by the hair, he does not seem to have paused to paint or carve obscene graffiti on his cave-wall, but presumably the lady was no better off for that. And in Eastern Europe, where the free market in pornography does not exist and the Marquis de Sade is not a recognized classic, there are

Tales from the Father of History

In Sparta, so they say,
was the ugliest baby; girl, parents' despair.
A nurse took her every day
to the sanctuary of Helen. There,

one day, a tall, stunning, gorgeously dressed
lady stood over the horrible little thing, smiled
at the protesting nurse, blessed
the baby and said: "This child

in a land of beautiful women shall grow
to be the loveliest of all." Of course, it was so.

In Egypt, the thickest
of eggs hatched by the Nile
grows into the biggest beast:
the monstrous crocodile.

In Sparta, once again,
they had the best government; perfect, foursquare.
It had been the worst in the memory of men.

Read history with care.

Richmond Lattimore

signs of persistent male chauvinism. The centre of the problem, then, is not pornography, which is an epiphenomenon, but in what sense, in the modern world, men should be men and women women. On this issue, Dworkin and Griffin seem to offer second-hand muddle rather than enlightenment.

Dworkin echoes Simone de Beauvoir's dictum from *Le Deuxième Sexe*: "One is not born a woman, one becomes a woman", which means that feminine attitudes are forced upon the female by society. This is a particular application of the general Existentialist principle that there is no given human nature: a female individual who becomes a woman in the pejorative sense is yielding to bad faith by not exercising her freedom to reject the prejudice handed down by society. In Sartre's original version of the doctrine, the physical sexual constitution has no direct effect on psychological gender, because the psyche is absolutely free. However, all human relationships are fundamentally sadomasochistic and sexualized, the "males" being dominant and the "females" recessive. According to their position on the sadomasochistic scale, some men may be female and some women male, and there may be a male/female tension between individuals of the same physical gender. Ms Dworkin, looked at in this light, is rejecting what she considers to be the historically conditioned female stereotype, and is adopting aggressiveness as a sadistic response to male sadism.

Ms Griffin is more Rousseauistic. She puts her trust in Nature, from which humanity has strayed, but to which it would return, happily slinging its natural song no doubt through an analogy with the birds. Unfortunately, she doesn't explain what the original, natural relationship between men and women was, so Nature, as usual, remains a pure hurrah word with no definable meaning. But, since she also refers to man's fear of the feminine element within himself, she must at times be close to the Existentialist view that masculinity and femininity

are not mutually exclusive essences. However, the implication is that a permanent feature of men is to deny the femininity within themselves; consequently, that femininity cannot amount to much.

As they are presented here, neither the neo-Existentialist nor the neo-Rousseauistic line of argument is convincing. If women are conditioned by society to be women, men must also be conditioned to be men, since it is impossible that women should start as neutral potentialities, while men are born as ready-made essences. Ms Griffin admits this at one point, but disregards the implications. Ms Dworkin storms at men, as if they were wicked essences; admittedly, in so doing, she is no more self-contradictory than Sartre himself, who, while denying the reality of essences, constantly treats the hated "bourgeois" as if he were an irredeemable essence.

But, if there are no in-born differences between males and females, where did the social conditioning originate? How did men come to be men, and women women? Everything in society must come from human beings, or from the interplay between mankind and the external world. In the last resort, neo-Existentialism and neo-Rousseauism coincide, in the sense that they dogmatically postulate the "pure" quality of the individual before he or she is distorted by human relationships. Simone de Beauvoir's dictum is the feminist reformulation of the famous sentence in *Le Contrat social*: "Man is born free, and he is everywhere in chains". Both assertions, if too simply understood, lead to the paranoid assumption that all social evil comes from the Other in some collective guise; in this instance Men, as if men had come to form a coherent category permanently ranged against women.

Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir were childless, like Locke, who invented the idea of the child mind as a *tabula rasa* on which experience writes. Every parent who has observed children and grand-children from birth knows that each individual temperament is unique, is coloured by physical gender, from the

beginning, and then undergoes a further massive conditioning at adolescence. The determinism is in the first place internal, whatever the interplay between the individual and the sexual fashions of the surrounding society. But where the Existentialists and Women's Lib are right is in emphasizing that a great deal of supposedly sexual behaviour has no permanent sexual root, and is no more than surface fashion, or perhaps fashion which has survived an original usefulness. I have noticed that some little boys will play with dolls' houses, if they are not teased for doing so, and that some little girls may prefer cars or trains. These are tiny examples but, combined with various developments in the contemporary world and anthropological evidence about the distribution of sexual roles in different societies, they show that, on one level, masculinity and femininity are very elastic concepts. On another level, however, they remain irreducible.

As for male chauvinism, whether or not it has anything to do with pornography, it may have been inevitable in the Stone Age and in some later periods as a necessary consequence of a division of labour between provider-defenders and child-bearers, but it has obviously no justification as a simple expression of male selfishness in advanced technological societies, where what counts in the general running of the community is the ability and character of the individual, independently of physical gender.

This is meant as a declaration of sweet reasonableness in response to the confused passion of Dworkin and Griffin. But I realize that it doesn't take us far. Women, until further notice, will continue to bear children, with all the ensuing complications. The physiological constitutions of men and women are usually at variance on many days in the month. Sex, as sex, being a fundamentally animal part of our nature, remains largely barbaric in any civilization. But at least men and women can try to treat each other as partners in coping with its essential, and often poetic, barbarism.



The fusion of the erotic and the aesthetic has long been recognized as a deeply rooted aspect of the Eastern consciousness. Indian art, in particular, reflected a religious outlook that viewed sexual love as a metaphor for the divine, a process by which the world is constantly re-created, and which offered to its human participants an inner experience of the eternal. In Indian temple sculpture one of the most ancient images, and still the most common, of the divine creative principle is the lingam, the erect male phallus. Such art was without the prudish overtones which might have disconcerted Western observers; sexual pleasure was an end to be unservedly pursued. The palace courtesans who offered sophisticated delights on earth were matched by celestial females called Apsaras, ready to reward dead heroes with heavenly pleasures. One such, in the act of unfurling her skirt, is shown in this stone-carving from the Rajaraj temple, Bhuvanesvara, Orissa. It dates from about A.D. 1000, and forms one of the illustrations to Eastern Erotic Art (176pp. Quartet Books, £15.00 7043 2291 9), Philip Rawson's lavishly illustrated monograph, which devotes equal attention to the erotic art of India, China and Japan.

Fine particular moments

By Anthony Thwaite

BERNARD SPENCER:

Collected Poems
Edited by Roger Bowen

149pp, Oxford University Press. £8.50.
0 19 211930 5

The fluctuation of reputation among poets makes an odd story. Look at the twentieth century alone. A few – a very few – make an almost immediate impact, shoot up like rockets, and stay there, even after their deaths: Auden, Dylan Thomas. Some work more slowly through either humdrumness or misunderstanding to be recognized, sooner or later, as Great: Yeats, Eliot. Others have a brief moment of extraordinary fame, often through early death, and then subside into an area in which they become the closest inspiration for a few later poets, or the subjects of these written by ambitious academics: Sidney Keyes, Keith Douglas. There are those who have an explicable but somehow bogus period of relative popularity and who then fall to a status lower than the footnote: Humbert Wolfe, Alan Rook.

Then there are those who, perhaps emerging early, seem to drop away, and then are rediscovered – and often over-praised – by a handful of individuals who see them as neglected touchstones, victims of a supposed later establishment: Basil Bunting, David Gascoyne, John Heath-Stubbs, C. H. Sisson. All these are names currently lauded by one set or another. And then – not finally, because nothing is final in this area of dispute and fashion – there are those dead poets, acknowledged even by their admirers to be minor, who keep on having their claims pressed by a disparate band of enthusiasts: Andrew Young, Norman Cameron, Kenneth Allott, Bernard Spencer.

The case of Bernard Spencer is interesting and instructive. In the 1930s his poems were in *New Verse* along with his very slightly older contemporaries Auden and MacNeice and his exact contemporary, Stephen Spender. He came from the same sort of background of comfort, ably-off professional families (his father was a knighted High Court Judge in Madras) who sent their children to prep schools and public schools: Spencer was at Marlborough at the same time as Betjeman, MacNeice, and Anthony Blunt. From there it was the inevitable passage to Oxford, where he arrived just after Auden's departure. He had a poem in *Oxford Poetry* 1929 (edited by MacNeice and Spender), and was co-editor of the 1930 and 1931 volumes.

After going down from Oxford in 1932 (a Second in Greats), it was an almost classic pre-war case of teaching in prep schools, working as an advertising copywriter, and as a script-writer for a small film company. Unfit for military service, in 1940 he took up his first British Council post in Salonika. From there on, until his mysterious accidental death in Vienna in 1963, Spencer was a Council officer largely working abroad, in Egypt, Sicily, Spain, Greece again, Turkey, and finally Austria. He married twice; his first wife died in Italy in 1947. On his fleeting visits back to Britain over the years he renewed his casual literary friendships in a way movingly recalled in an elegy by the late G. S. Fraser.

The impression that comes across of Spencer the man is of someone rather elegant, quietly stylish and witty, diffident, with something about him of the faun or sprite, (Geoffrey Origen in a characteristic observation: "Bernard was a sprite, of rather low pressure; you looked and he wasn't there; and then a shape came back, and he was palpable again, gentle and sweet in temper.") The diffidence seems to have extended to his attitude towards publication: he didn't publish his first book (*Agave*) until 1946, and published only two other books of poems in his lifetime. In Fletcher's words, one of those "finely pro-

duced volumes done in the 1950s and 1960s by the University of Reading School of Art, and *With Luck Lasting* came out in the year of his death. As for periodical publication, Spencer seems to have relied almost entirely on Grigson as go-between in *New Verse* in the 1930s and on John Lehmann and Alan Ross in the *London Magazine* in the 1950s and early 1960s. Many poems were published posthumously in the *London Magazine* by Ross, who was also responsible for the earlier *Collected Poems* of 1965.

Roger Bowen has done an excellent job in this new and expanded *Collected Poems*. He reprints all the work from the 1965 volume, and has added twenty-six poems "previously uncollected and unpublished, 1935-1963", as well as an appendix of nine poems written when Spencer was an undergraduate and published in Oxford periodicals and anthologies between 1929 and 1932. Two brief statements made by Spencer in 1942 and 1963 are included, and there are very full bibliographical notes, sometimes with variant readings for individual poems. Bowen's Introduction is full of clearly presented information, and his literary observations and judgments are perceptive and generous without being showily clever or over-demonstrative. My only regret is that he has not included an appendix Spencer's conversation with Peter Orr, recorded for the British Council in 1962 and published in *The Poet Speaks* three years after Spencer's death. This conversation amplified and put in context a number of notions hinted at by Spencer elsewhere.

One of these is the necessity of loneliness. Living most of his working life in non-English-speaking communities, professionally having to do the bonhomous British Council thing, he seems almost to have cultivated a kind of precarious isolation, his literary friendships being sporadic and depending on which bit of the world he happened to be in at any one time. (Keith Douglas, Lawrence Durrell and George Seferis were among these friends.) He lacked a first-hand audience; but

the nature of my life is that I have to keep a lot of company and I don't get enough loneliness. . . . You must let the pressures build up inside you and not be diluted by literary talk.

The loneliness and the pressures combined to produce a body of work which is characterized by a sense of detachment and sense of quiddity, of the unrepeatable moment. There is something of MacNeice in this, though Spencer was not MacNeice's mixture of melancholy Horatian ironist and diffident outsider. Some of the early poems included in Professor Bowen's appendix of Oxford work, look rather like the youthful, fantastical MacNeice of *Blind Fireworks*. Much later, in the section of uncollected poems, there is "Pino":

A time of waiting. Most of our life is that. . . .
But waiting sometimes yields with the sign of things amazingly connected.

This – Spencer's version of MacNeice's "drunkenness of things being verbose" – was his way into writing his own best poems: small visions of the things of this world, freshly and quiddity noted.

Others among the 1929-1932 poems look like blindings or imitations of early Spender. ("In day, in the tide's in the great flame's reaching. . .") and early Auden. ("Eyes left from need's service/See world too enraptured.") But Spencer's "Allotments: April" first published in *New Verse* in 1936 and probably still his most frequently anthologized poem, has a particular sensuousness all its own. He wrote better poems, but already, with hindsight – one can see the troubled savagery which is his peculiar mark. A few years later, in a piece on "Ideas about Poetry" in the wartime Cairo publication *Personal Landscape*, he wrote that "True poetry is a dance in which you take

part and enjoy yourself"; and enjoyment of this both joined and separate kind, is the note in so much of his work.

Spencer evidently realized that one inborn or acquired characteristic which held him back was a certain fastidiousness. In that same *Personal Landscape* piece he writes of the poet having "to brutalize himself" in order to break away from habitual civilities; and in this he was echoing a brief comment he contributed to the special "Auden Double Number" of *New Verse* in 1937, when he wrote of Auden that he "succeeds in brutalizing his thought and language to the level from which important poetry issues." But he seems to have been thinking, or wishfully thinking, against the grain of his own inclinations. There is nothing brutal or brutalizing in Spencer's poems. Much more, he is Forster's Cavafy, "at a slight angle to the universe". Through the diffidence and the vanishing-act, something distinct emerges.

What that is has to be established through indications, as Spencer himself achieved it. He was self-consciously "a stranger here" – for example in "Notes by a Foreigner": "Illusion, your old failure – to see except as a foreigner. . . ." and in "Letter Home": "City where I live, not home, road that flows with me, police, what in all worlds am I doing here?" These are ways of fixing and defining oneself. But equally there are those moments which signal "things amazingly connected". Spencer, early and late, was good in a very unexpected way at memorializing moments of precarious

happiness. In "Part of Plenty" (1937), he begins with a celebration of his first wife, Nora:

When she carries food to the table and stoops down
– Doing this out of love – and lays soup
with its good
Ticking smell, or fry winking from the fire
And I look up, perhaps from a book I am reading,
Or other work: there is an importance of beauty
Which can't be accounted for by there and then,
And attacks me, but not separately from the welcome
Of the food, or the grace of her arms. . . .

And in what was one of his last poems, written in 1963, "Traffic in April", he catches a moment of wonderful accident and hilarity in Vienna, on a day when he was being driven on Embassy business through traffic chaos:

The Austrian
driver lifted his hands from the wheel and
was guffawing.
All these cars hooded; it was April, the snow just melted,
the church towers,
the golden hands of the clocks
glittering.
We had little
German or English for communication,
but the two of us, clambering out to
gawp.

on that fine particular day
did the kind of language needed for a
screw-loose world, and for laughing.
Spencer's poems are full of such fine particular days, or moments in such days. His slightly bemused professional exile to various parts of the Mediterranean, especially, gave him a sense of daily contact with a living

past. In the interview with Peter Orr, he said: "The fact of being in some sort of continuity with earlier civilizations does have an exciting effect on me". He collaborated with Nanos Valaoritis and Lawrence Durrell on those fine versions of Seferis which John Lehmann published as *The King of Asine*; and though Spencer lacked (and presumably never sought) the elusive rhetoric of Seferis, something of the passionate – and estranged – archaeology was there; in, for example, Spencer's "Greek Excavations", "Acce", and "Sarcophagi".

Homelike, less exotic moments are captured just as felicitously, in a number of poems remembering his dead wife, or in such a poem as "The Wedding Pictures", in which the sharpness of detail accumulates towards the unexpected stab of the last two lines:

New from his morning at the graveyard
and on his shoes the crust of graveyard
clay.
His were very personal rhythms,
sometimes uncertain, or at any rate
difficult to follow. The detail – and it
is a poetry carried by detail – occasionally seems to wander away from any forward thrust, as if such confidence would be a betrayal, or a coarsening of his instinctive quizzical sidestep. But there is never anything
fey about him. Through all the indirectness there remains, after one has followed him through the poems in this splendid edition, the flavour of a distinct and irreplaceable person. Bernard Spencer may have been "minor"; but his admirers, including Roger Bowen, do well to see that his work is remembered and relished.

Selling circles

By Geoffrey Naylor

DANIEL J. and KATHERINE KYES
LEAB:

The Auction Companion
490pp. Macmillan. £9.95.
0 333 270270 2

The editors of *American Book Prices Current* (the yearly international guide to recent auction results for antiquarian books and MSS which they have revived to new standards of punctuality and excellence) have had the good idea of compiling a handbook to the world of the auctioneer's world. In its first edition it is inevitably a bit patchy (Denmark and Sweden, but no Norway), and although the gazetteer ends impressively with Zimbabwe (Fitz-Gerald & Des Fontaines of Que Que), the bias is noticeably towards a London-New York axis. On this line there is of course an emphasis on the Christie's/Sotheby's market, where commercial history and current practice dictate standards for the rest of the world. But the two most famous firms no longer hog even the uppermost part of the scene. Mr and Mrs Leab are able to add to the old joke that Christie's were gentlemen pretending to be businessmen, and Sotheby's vice versa, the quip that "it can now be said that Sotheby's and Christie's are multinational public companies, pretending to be private firms, while Phillips is a private firm pretending to be a public company".

The *Auction Companion* has a good deal of useful advice for the novice on how to buy and how to sell, when to bid in person, or through an agent, or through the desk. They are particularly insistent that intending sellers should inform themselves in advance of the various charges that will be deducted from their realized prices, and advise them to avoid "auction consultants", whose advice is usually based on which auction house will give the highest bidder's fee for bringing in the goods. They are rather drowsy about dealers' rings, dismissed only in very general terms: "it would have been useful, though impractic-

able, to have had detailed local intelligence, saleroom by saleroom ("Ask Albert Tatlock, usually in the snug bar of the Rover's Return", etc).

It is not just the tyro buyer who will find the *Companion* helpful. It will be particularly useful even for experienced international purchasers for the up-to-date information it gives on local and national tax complications, and on export restrictions. Thus would-be purchasers of firearms and ammunition from Weller & Duffty, the specialist Birmingham dealers, or those wishing to buy live game at Sotheby's South Africa, Johannesburg, are warned of special regulations. VAT – whether on buyer's surcharges alone, or on the hammer price, is clearly noted; in Denmark a staggering charge of over twenty two per cent on the gross price is a deterrent to the international market.

Local practice as well as local fiscal regulation is dealt with in an introductory note to each country. There is a particularly clear exposition of the dominant role of the exclusive seventy-eight brethren of the Compagnie des Commissaires-Priseurs de Paris, still being cautiously challenged, and the complexities of the as yet only partially awakened Japanese market are mentioned for the benefit of the unwary occidental punter.

Over six hundred auction houses are listed, the editors having processed very humbly their answers to a detailed questionnaire. Some may be less grand and organized than they seem from their short entries; there are a number of Irish firms (Ulster and Elze) that sound as if they came straight out of *Irish Rm*. Social facilities are mentioned as well as buying and selling terms, range of services, and cataloguing practice. At O'Gallerie of Portland, Oregon, the (1972) founder Mr Dale O'Grady conducts a family business in which his grandson runs the snack-bar on sale nights. Unusual specialties are picked out; there is a firm in San Diego with a list in architectural antiques for commercial restaurant interiors; another in Houston specializing in 19th century reproductions in walnut turning out of

London; we read of one dealing mainly with earth-moving equipment in Sydney, and there are Prussian decorations to be bought in Munich from auctioneers who are published authorities on Nazi militaria.

Six hundred is not yet enough. There were bound to be omissions on the first appearance of a novel compilation: The north of England, particularly the north-east, seems at present to be under-represented, and Portugal, Malta, Gibraltar and Egypt are barely mentioned of salerooms. The next edition would be improved by a topographical index so that auction firms in Stamford or Ormskirk, Buffalo or Chattanooga could be picked out by place as well as by speciality or alphabetical order of company name.

Apart from technical information about trade descriptions and premiums (commendably up-to-date, although the book went to press before the arbitrators' report on the London dispute over Christie's and Sotheby's buyers' charges was available), there is much diverting general information. Dutch auctions, "we are told, are apparently unknown in the Netherlands, and the provincial 'colonels' of the United States have a courtesy title given to all auctioneers, not merely to those from Kentucky. Mr and Mrs Leab also mention a bored catalogue of modern paintings at Christie's some years ago invented an artist called Van Eassell, and managed to sell the work. The authors convey their carefully prepared information with an engaging pat, and without being too jokey about it show that they seem from their short entries; there are a number of Irish firms (Ulster and Elze) that sound as if they came straight out of *Irish Rm*. Social facilities are mentioned as well as buying and selling terms, range of services, and cataloguing practice. At O'Gallerie of Portland, Oregon, the (1972) founder Mr Dale O'Grady conducts a family business in which his grandson runs the snack-bar on sale nights. Unusual specialties are picked out; there is a firm in San Diego with a list in architectural antiques for commercial restaurant interiors; another in Houston specializing in 19th century reproductions in walnut turning out of

The latest edition of *The British Art & Antique Yearbook* (611pp. National Magazine Co. £8.50. 0 90030 524 X) lists, as usual, London dealers alphabetically and provincial dealers under their appropriate town and county headings, but this year there is a useful new Specialists Section. This contains the names, addresses and telephone numbers of dealers offering antiques and works of art, classified under 174 categories, ranging from American to Wrightian.

Doing without gender

By Roger Scruton

MARY VETTERLING-BRAGGIN
(Editor):

Sexual Language
A Modern Philosophical Analysis
329pp. Littlefield, Adams and Co
(distributed by Sheldon Press).
£4.75.
0 8226 0353 5

"A person could be powerful without exercising the control oneself." That sentence comes from the pen of a distinguished political economist. After a moment's hesitation I took it to mean: "Someone could be powerful without exercising the control himself." The barrier to intelligibility stems from a conviction that grammatical distinctions of gender should be eliminated, unless they are relevant to the subject. And this re-education of the common language is now almost universally accepted by feminists as part of their aim. Should they be encouraged?

The present collection purports to contribute to our understanding of that question. It consists of twenty-three essays which, according to the blurb, represent "pro" and "con" analysis of the feminist claim that much of our language is sexist, in the sense of enforcing, expressing, or lending covert support to, unjustifiable distinctions between men and women. As a matter of fact, there is only one article "con", a rash effusion by Michael Levin, chosen for its vulnerability and subjected to excruciating nit-picking by the two that follow, and even to a side-swipe from the editor in her preface. Every other article is written from a standpoint within the feminist movement, and many of them endorse the kind of grammatical aberration from which I began. The essays are exercises in "philosophical analysis", so

is not surprising to find that they are for the most part cold, humourless, uncultured, and dull. It is somewhat more surprising to find that they contain not a moment's hesitation, not an ounce of scepticism, not the slightest reluctance to advance from jejune premises to the vast and tendentious conclusions about language, about sexuality and sexual relations, about the mystery and meaning of human existence, for which they are each of them remarkable. Every quality that makes the practice of philosophy worthwhile, and its product readable, – the questioning of received ideas, the preparedness to entertain the opposite of one's own convictions, the sense of the difficulty and complexity of human life and intellect, the search for puzzles and paradoxes rather than ready solutions – is absent from these essays; instead they read like a caricature, at first ridiculous, subsequently depressing, of a graduate essay in philosophy, making pointless distinctions, laying out worthless arguments in numbered sentences, defining unnecessary technicalities, and generally assailing the reader's intelligence with evasive quibbles about words that seem relevant only because so many of the words are obscene. Pedantic listing of vulgar expressions is interspersed with daring theoretical claims – such as that a "feminist linguistics" will overthrow the currently accepted theory of linguistic competence, or that concern about the infrequency of female orgasms embodies a confusion about the concept of sexual intercourse (the concept, note, not the fact).

An assumption common to most of the essays is that, when the sex of a person is not in issue, it would be irrelevant to signal it in language. Suppose I were to say that, whenever my being a person, rather than a heavy body, was not in issue, it would be irrelevant to refer to me as such. I would surely have lost the

sense of how important, how fundamental to my self-awareness, is this way of identifying myself. To rid my language of the redundant reference to personality would in fact be impossible: I should have to say, not "I am sleeping", but "My body lay sleeping", or "My body crushed the cushion", and so on. Now it is a fact that my sex is also fundamental to my self-consciousness: in those things that most matter to me, I think of myself as a man. Should I not do so? The question is a deep one: it requires us to understand the extent to which sexuality enters and determines our nature as human beings, the extent to which we do and must identify ourselves through sexual attributes, the extent to which our lives as moral agents are woven not only on the way of personality, but also with the woof of masculine and feminine. The idea that distinctions of sex run so deep that it might actually be inhuman to ignore them is hardly ever entertained in these essays. Of course, it may not be true: but a philosopher ought to be prepared to entertain it; he should not, as our authors do, let such important ideas as "person", "man", and "woman", go unexamined, or rush forward to fore-ordained conclusions with the self-indulgence of a person who seeks only to convince himself.

Very few of the writers seem to be aware of the existence of languages other than English. One of them, however, makes the extremely pertinent (although not quite accurate) observation that Japanese grammar is marked not for sex but for social class. He does not draw any conclusions from this, but perhaps the example is worth considering: does it enable us to identify the role of class in the Japanese consciousness, or the extent to which distinctions of class are enforced, expressed, enacted (which of these words is the right

one?) by Japanese speech? Is it significant that one's class can be changed, while one's sex normally cannot? Is my identity as a lower middle-class upstart as fundamental to my ways of identifying myself as show that my being male is, after all, irrelevant to self-reference? Not only do the writers not examine this extremely important case, where social distinctions are embedded in grammar; they do not attend to other my maleness? If so, should I change my language to accommodate that fact, or should I use that fact to languages in which gender persists. Is it significant, for example, that the feminine version of a proper name in Slavonic languages is formed from the possessive case, so that Mrs Novakova is firmly identified as Novak's? (Are the Czechs more possessive of their women than we are?) Is it significant that our neutral "man" and "he" reflect the German use of *man* as an impersonal pronoun? Is it significant that *personne* in French is feminine, or that there are languages, such as Latin, Greek, French and German (and that seem to be unknown to the contributors) in which distinctions of gender range over inanimate objects? More importantly, what are we supposed to make of languages in which there are no gender distinctions? Take Turkish, for example: There is no way of marking the sex of the subject through Turkish grammar alone: are we to conclude that the Turks have always been in the forefront of the struggle for women's rights, that Turkish women have all the freedoms and respect that their American sisters presently yearn for, that the institution of the *harem* is the ideal to which all women (and not just Lady Mary Wortley Montagu) should aspire? ("Tis true," wrote Lady Mary, "that their law permits them four wives, but there is no instance of a man of quality that would make use of this liberty, or of a woman of rank that would suffer

it. When a husband happens to be inconstant [as those things will happen] he keeps his mistress in a house apart, and visits her as privately as he can, just as 'tis with you".) Or perhaps Atatürk should have taken the language reforms further, and introduced gender into the language to compensate for the removal of the veil?

It is clear that this question of gender, discussed at the low level of seriousness and cultural attainment exemplified in this book, looks like a fantasy issue, chosen for the readiness with which it lends itself to unthinking prejudice. However, not only is the aim of this tasteless assault on the language a dubious one, it also seems that no amount of learning and culture will suffice to protect us from it. Even the American Modern Language Association, for many years a bastion of serious criticism and literary scholarship, has resolved to remove all "irrelevant" uses of gender from its publications. There is something shrill and hysterical in the fervour that speaks through that resolution; but much more research will be needed before any of us will be in a position to hint at the cause.

Animal Play Behaviour by Robert Fagen (684pp. Oxford University Press. £21, paperback £10.50. 0 19 302 760 4 and 0 19 302761 2) is an investigation into the phenomenon of play as a behavioural tactic available to immature and mature individuals expressed in accordance with strategies dictated by natural selection. The author describes animal play behaviour as a "major biological paradox" and looks at the arguments for the importance of play in social development. *Animal Play Behaviour* stresses the functional and evolutionary biology of play in animals, using concepts of social evolutionary biology and evolutionary developmental ethology.

A touch of the Peasant Quality

By Frank Tuohy

LIAM O'FLAHERTY:
The Black Soul
256pp. £6.
0 905473 63 9
Shame the Devil
285pp. £8.
0 905473 64 7
Dublin: Wolfhound Press.

Liam O'Flaherty was a famous name among Irish writers during the first years of Independence, but after publishing some thirty or more books he stopped writing in the early 1950s. Two of these books have now been reissued. *The Black Soul*, described by AE as "the most elemental thing in Irish literature", was his second novel, which came out in 1924. *Shame the Devil*, written ten years later, is a chapter of autobiography, a fluently written account of his struggle with "writer's block" — though one might say that in the case of a writer who had published approximately twenty books in the previous decade, writer's block was an example of outraged nature reasserting her rights.

O'Flaherty arrived with impeccable credentials for the second generation of the Irish literary movement: if he had not existed, it was said, it would have been necessary to invent him. Reading about him makes him seem like a character in somebody's else's fiction, and raises the question as to whether he himself was the best witness to his own extremely varied experience. He was born in the Aran Islands in 1886, about the same time that W. B. Yeats and Arthur Symonds paid their visit and encouraged J. M. Synge to follow them there. Unlike these writers, O'Flaherty was the child of extremely poor peasants; Gaelic was his first language. His escape from the islands was by the traditional

means: he planned to enter the priesthood and in this way gained an education which took him as far as University College, Dublin.

Later, he attributed this step to calculation, but his subsequent life would indicate that the experience marked him indelibly. Following a path which was to see much two-way traffic in future years, he moved from the rigidities of an authoritarian church to those of the Communist Party. But he contracted another allegiance in between these two: soon after the outbreak of the First World War, he enlisted in the Irish Guards as a private soldier, and spent three years on the Western Front. The effects of this experience — what was then known as "shell-shock" — were to mark him more profoundly than anything else. Trauma and regeneration provide the theme of both *The Black Soul* and *Shame the Devil*. It has been suggested, moreover, that the working out of his wartime experience was a prime motive in his writing, and that, after achieving some sort of resolution, he gave up writing altogether.

In 1922 O'Flaherty led a small group to occupy the Rotunda in Dublin and declare an Irish Soviet. After this farcical interlude, his political faith seems to have become secondary to his literary career. His first novel was accepted by Jonathan Cape and their reader, Edward Garnett, became a sort of father-figure to him, as he had been to many other writers, though his enthusiasm was likely to wane if they became commercially successful. According to O'Flaherty, "We practically wrote *The Black Soul* together. I remember his burning 10,000 words of manuscript upon which I had spent a whole month. I could have shot him." London rather than Dublin at this time was the place where O'Flaherty's ambition lay: H. E. Bates, another Garnett protégé, describes his "fierce blue unstable

eyes" as he recited "flowing nonsense... about 'women pressin' their thighs into the warm flanks of the horses.'" Sean O'Casey's wife found him handsome, immaculate, surrounded by admirers, and conceited. He himself thought that "the English hate all Irish people who are not clowns for their amusement". He was up against the problem of presenting his experience unaltered but in a way that would be accessible to English and American readers, from whom alone success would come. In this he was less proficient than others of his generation.

The Black Soul was a failure in London but received the accolade of AE and other Irish critics. It is the story of Fergus O'Connor, called throughout "The Stranger", who comes to the islands to recover from a breakdown. He lodges with a beautiful peasant woman, Little Mary, and her impotent, partially insane husband Red John. The narrative takes us through the four seasons and ends with Red John's final madness and death, and the departure of "The Stranger", now cured, and Little Mary for the mainland. *The Black Soul* is full of what the Abbey Theatre used to call P.Q. — Peasant Quality — though the characterization is rudimentary, even for a novel that aims at poetry and romance. The somewhat colourless dialogue can be attributed to the fact that O'Flaherty was transcribing Gaelic: he had no need to invent anything like Synge-alese or Lady Gregory's Kiltartan, since no one finds his own language picturesque. But his descriptive prose is often brilliant. He has a strong visual sense.

His novel *The Informer* became a famous film — and here the madness and death of Red John are presented with the sort of high melodrama which would be effective on the screen. In the 1920s and 1930s, such a book would have been a candidate for the Nobel Prize, but a fatally

frivolous English reader cannot forget *Cold Comfort Farm*. Apart from a lack of humour — it is difficult to forget the scenes where mad Red John drives his two black pigs up and down the mountain — there are objections at a deeper level. It is pardonable for J. M. Synge, a complete outsider, to be wrong about the Aran Islands, to romanticize what was in fact a rural slum, where children were living on boiled nettles. With O'Flaherty, who must have known the truth but wished to hide it, there seems to have been a lapse in sincerity in order to please his public.

Again, both in *The Black Soul* and in the short story "The Caresse", which concludes *Shame the Devil* and represents the breakthrough from his writer's block, there is an unlikely presentation of sexual relationships in an intensely puritanical society. As H. E. Bates's observation suggests, O'Flaherty often sounds like

D. H. Lawrence with a brogue.

The centre of interest in autobiography is supposed to be the self, rather than the outside world. But in Irish literary memoir the pleasure usually depends on watching the paying off of old scores. Yeats, George Moore, Sean O'Casey are all masters of the genre. *Shame the Devil* lacks this element. Absence of humour is again a problem. Though he writes in the George Moore manner, with a lot of inauthentic dialogue, some of which is carried on with himself, the final effect is somewhat tiresome and egotistic: there is the feeling that both the man and his experience are being undersold.

Both these books arouse an interest in O'Flaherty and his work which they fail to satisfy. But it is hard to decide whether that interest is a genuinely literary one, or curiosity about an unusual figure in the cultural history of modern Ireland.

The decay of purpose

By Holly Eley

ROY A. K. HEATH:
Genetha
185pp. Allison and Busby. £6.95.
0 8503 410 0

As a portrait of a fragmented, post-colonial subject with no real history, in which nihilistic characters find little outlet for their feelings beyond illusion or each other, Roy A. K. Heath's trilogy of novels — *From the Heat of the Day*, *One Generation* and *Genetha* — recalls Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*; a significant difference being that Heath is himself Guyanese, and not an observer from the outside.

In *From the Heat of the Day*, Sonny Armstrong's dependence on women is the main theme. His wife's social background is different from his own, and the divergence of their expectations, coupled with obsessive reliance on each other inevitably foreshadows an enclosed, diseased atmosphere in which their two children and their two unpaid maids are trapped. All of Heath's main characters are flawed, however apparently self-sufficient and attractive. Armstrong's son Rohan, who as a child has benefited from the kindness of Esther (the steadiest of the two maids) as well as from a good education, is shown in *One Generation* to be as vulnerable as his father. His unreasonably persistent attachment to a married East Indian woman is the cause of unhappiness to many, and in other surroundings it would provoke tragedy of Dostoevskian proportions. In all three novels dramatic behaviour is dictated by the torpor of the society in which it takes place. However attractive the elegant, decaying Georgetown residential streets, or the primitive settlement of Morawhanna in New Amsterdam where, in *Genetha*, Rohan's sister Genetha lives "a season of ineffable contentment" with her smoker-ace lover, fingers, we are always aware that this is Conrad's land without memories.

On one level *Genetha* is a perceptible account of a young black woman's independent life after the death of her father, followed by the self-exile and death of an elder brother; on another level it is an intense search for self. What happens to her is novelistic but doesn't seem particularly so. Picturesque Barbados, fret-worked balconies, ubiquitous cake-shops, the jungle with its blue and emerald tropical birds — all are beautifully described, but this lush backdrop hardly ameliorates the bleakness of Genetha's condition.

The novel has some good jokes (though the one about the drunken wake and the exhausted corpse is surely due for retirement), and some effective passages describing Irish landscape and "weak and god-damn effect on the minds and characters of the country people." Mullen is a talented and ambitious writer, but *Genetha* is too sophisticated for the profundity of myth and too arbitrary to be wholly satisfying as a novel.

deed throw away, everything she has in order to be free. Without difficulty or regret she rids herself of her respectable, church-going suitor, then of her respectable reputation. Her happiness with macho, idle fingers is brief, and ends when she makes over her family home to him and finds herself evicted. Her short stay in an asylum is not dwell on, although later it becomes clear that during it something occurred which gave her the courage to forgo further physical involvements with men. Moving from one cheap lodging to another, from a demeaning job as a waitress to one as an assistant in a corner grocery, enfeebled by self-neglect and lack of food she is rescued by her parents' ex-maid, who provides her with shelter and tolerates her introspection and directionlessness. Esther has become a madam and Genetha, passively, becomes an amateur prostitute. Heath's ear for language is exact; some of the best moments occur in dialogues between Esther's good-natured, bucolic whores — the only wholly cheerful characters in the book — and the drifting West Indians, whose machismo requires them to rely heavily on institutionalized sex.

Genetha too is a drifter, moving with seeming vacuity from menial job to brothel, from brothel to her aunt's villa and back to the rooming house, unable to translate her liberty into a sense of purpose, but below the aimlessness there is resolve, and she continues to search for meaning in a society that, having no idea of itself, is unable to provide her with one. As her detachment grows, she looks, at first hesitantly, then with conviction, to the Catholic church for spiritual help. In what might seem a cynical ending — it is only too predictable in the ambience depicted by Heath — the church proves no less. Heath's church proves no less. Heath's church proves no less. Heath's church proves no less.

Like her mother she is determined to be herself and escape the dominance of weak men, unlike her mother she is prepared to lose, in-

From the refinery

By T. A. Shippey

JEAN QUEVAL (Translator):
Beowulf
L'épopée fondamentale de la littérature anglaise
188pp. Paris: Gallimard.

Medievalists frequently find themselves engaged in the exercise of comparing English works with their French originals, sources of inspiration. Malory with the "Vulgate Cycle", *The Owl and the Nightingale* with the "Laisic" lay, *Sir Gawain* (perhaps) with Chrétien's *Yvain*. The results are consistent enough to reinforce simple cultural stereotypes. As works are translated from French to English, they become emotionally flatter, more interested in the outside world, at once simpler and more redundant, more inclined to ethical compromise. Often, too, one gets a sense of the early English writer, while fascinated and dominated by his foreign model, mentally pursuing his lips and muttering the medieval equivalent of "This will never do".

It is accordingly something of a shock (no doubt salutary) to be faced with the reverse process, *Beowulf* in French. At first sight the stereotypes still hold good. Jean Queval says plainly in his introduction that "la lettre de Beowulf est imperméable au français", and gives himself liberty accordingly to translate where necessary the spirit alone. And the spirit of epic, in his view, is fairly inimical, among other things, to feet. When *Beowulf* approaches the Danish king he finds the evil counsellor Unferth sitting at Hrothgar's feet (*et fortum*) — a natural posture in an early state of society, even a traditional one. It will not do in French, though, and has become "Il était assis dans l'ombre du prince des Danois". "In the shade?" (the English poet might have thought.) "What shade? They were inside. It

may be true that Unferth at this moment was overshadowed, controlled by his king, as he would not be later, but I hadn't got on to that yet."

The answer, presumably, is that shades are more dignified *per se* than feet. But *Beowulf*, while immensely on its dignity, has not yet learnt to dignify by abstraction. In this new translation it has had many physicalities pruned. On hearing the brave counsels of Beowulf, Hrothgar, close to despair, leapt up, for all his age: *ahleop tha se gawela*. In French he "ne se tint plus de joie". By contrast, when Grendel's mother got Beowulf down, she quickly sat on him: *ofset tha*. This becomes "elle assure sa prise et le couvre tout entier", a much less plain and easily visualized action.

The gap between original and translation, English coarseness and French refinement, is at its greatest with Grendel. As is well known, what the hero does to him is to tear his arm off and let him bleed to death. As is less well known, the poet never actually says this in so many words, preferring to keep the shocking resolution cancelled till the moment when the hero is seen laying down hand, arm and shoulder all complete beneath the roof of the hall. However the poet does dwell with relish on the rending and splitting as "sinews sprang, bone-locks burst". None of this is recovered at all by M. Queval, who instead cuts this critical moment very sharply down, covering it with the moralizing remark, "C'est terrible un être qui tombe en quenouille" — a phrase I do not understand in that context, but one of a string of apostrophes and readers' guides: "Ah! la funeste expédition!... Trompeuse espérance!... Ah, destin trop cruel!"

Beowulf is fiercer than Corneille: one might of course say the same of Dickens, Shakespeare, or Malory, thus arriving at a very simple national characterization. Indeed. More interesting perhaps is the reflection

that while both English and French on the whole agree about who are plainer and who are more refined, each side tends to think the other significantly impolite. This is clear enough from Malory, who noted in his source such matters as King Arthur threatening one of his knights and the knight agreeing, out of fear, but emended silently, perhaps even unconsciously, to a scene in which Sir Gareth supports his uncle the king against Sir Lancelot out of family loyalty and so as to put on a decent show.

By contrast M. Queval seems on occasion uncertain about what is "good form" and what is not, pointing in this way to the surprisingly large areas of English conservatism over the issue of self-respect. He does not respond to understatement. When *Beowulf* thinks of sailing to Denmark, the wise men "blamed him little", i.e. not at all, i.e. they said it was a good idea. This becomes "voulurent l'en dissuader".

... Devait-il se risquer? But what authority have non-participants over a hero? None at all, evidently. Even in *Sir Gawain*, many centuries later, the bystanders who criticize Arthur for letting Gawain ride off to the Green Chapel do so behind his back, dishonourably. Perhaps "that's his affair" comes more easily in English. In similar style I am sure Queval has got the Danes' prayers to the Devil wrong. Pray to "the slayer of souls" they might. Offsetting him "leurs paroles de guerre contre la vie tranquille", however, would be too shocking for words. *Wigweorthunga* here means something different, something evil but not leading to an open surrender of class symbols.

A French *Beowulf* is bound, seemingly, to be glossed, to be bowdlerized: "intériorisée et domptée, très française" is Queval's phrase for the danger he feared. Nevertheless Queval would not be translating the poem at all if he did



Good, too, are the clarifications of emotional states. *Beowulf* does contain "de brusques décrochages", as Queval notes, and often he clears them up, adding short explanations to the sudden turns of some of the speeches. However other scenes and speeches in the poem work on internal balances of one kind or another, like Beowulf's thrice-repeated "If I can... if I hear... if he means" in his final words to Hrothgar. It is rare for Queval to miss one of these, while often he brings out unobtrusively an "interiorization" the poet had forgotten or failed to put into words — like the silent but surely meant comparison between King Hrothel and the hanged man's father, both of them hand-maid by convention.

Queval's introduction, finally, is worth reading too, if not for its historical speculations (disarmingly written off by the author as "un peu puériles"), then for its surprising outsider's observations on metaphor, redundancy, the "autorité de la consomme" in alliterative verse. This is only the second French translation of *Beowulf* and the first for over a century. Reading it makes one aware how formidable are the barriers to understanding other cultures, even those of near neighbours.

Maggot in your eye

By T. O. Treadwell

MICHAEL MULLEN:
Kelly
192pp. Dublin: Wolfhound Press. £6.
0 905473 69 8

The customary — almost the unique — subject of the Irish novelist is the nature of Irishness, but this theme normally takes one of two mutually exclusive forms, the sardonic or the celebratory. Both approaches have their pitfalls, and the chief danger in the latter, the tendency of celebration to slide into self-congratulation, is particularly pernicious. Michael Mullen's energetic and frequently funny novel is a salute to Irish robustness, but through the familiar boozing, bawling, wenching surface seeps an occasional whiff of smugness.

Kelly is a novel about myth in the form of a myth. As it opens, the omniscient hero lies chained in a field in the County Mayo, writhing in agony as his eye is steadily consumed by a voracious maggot. The reader may suspect at this early stage that he is in the presence of a symbol, and if he turns to the back of the dust jacket where a photograph and short biography of Mullen appear, his suspicion will be reinforced. The author sits, bearing the traditional appearances of the intellectual (oculogonist spectacles, pipe, beard) before a shelf-full of books, while the legend beneath the picture tells of his interest in the psychology of Jung (separate date gossamer, presumably), as well as the art of Zorin and Munch. The effect is to convey the strong impression of a man who isn't simply telling the tale of a mythic hero, but is making a statement.

Fearing that the maggot will grow until it destroys the countryside, the local people urge drastic action, and the village blacksmith cauterizes Kelly's eye with a red-hot poker. As the fiery thing burns into his socket, Kelly is carried back through fifty centuries to the threshold of "the dwarfy, thick doors of his racepast", the hall where the old gods of Ireland are gathered, there to be told that he is one of them.

Kelly's maggot, it seems, is his Irishness — the old Celtic-heretic strain faintly weakened by the coming of St Patrick and Christianity. In modern Ireland, this Irishness is destructive, but the blacksmith's poker burns the maggot into Kelly's very bloodstream and he becomes a god. He returns to a consciousness of the present newly possessed of a Herculean physique, together with (readers familiar with the format will have anticipated this) massive sexual equipment. Breaking free of his chains, Kelly snatches a sow and a barrel of porter and heads for the hills where he stings himself naked in the excitement of his godlike exploits and freedom.

Kelly now begins his wanderings all over Ireland. He is joined by two companions, Faustus, MacGinty, a dwarf of voluminous reading and extravagant erudition, and Leblide Ludden, a huge and innocent idiot. Both Faustus and Leblide, pure mind and pure body, are ineffectual and frustrated on their own — they need Kelly to bring them together and make them one. The three set out on the back of Lubach Caoi, a horse of woebe-gone appearance but magical powers, on a journey which is initially aimless, but becomes a quest for Kate Houlihan, pure Celt and the most beautiful woman in Ireland, who is being held prisoner by her mad foster-father until she can be married off to the man with the bluest blood in Europe. The latter turns out to be Robert Ortega

Bollingbrook, a hideous old roud, from whose ulcerous embrace Kate is snatched, at the moment of her wedding, by Kelly disguised as a harper.

Myth moves readily into allegory, and it becomes increasingly clear that *Kelly* is a novel about the need for the reinvigoration of Ireland by the old pagan energies. In this sense, Michael Mullen belongs in the company of the Celtic revivalists of the last century, men like Standish O'Grady and Douglas Hyde who found in Irish legend and folk-tale the seeds of an uncontaminated national consciousness. But the point about these tales is precisely their unlikelihood, their pure and artless lack of sophistication. Mullen, by contrast, is a very self-conscious artist, and as such he is often at odds with the spirit of his material.

Kelly is most successful when it is his most satirical. The dwarf Faustus is tolerated by his blockish schoolfellows, for example, because of his ability to translate the ruler bits of Ovid for them in the lavatory. And the great mythic employment of selecting Latin tombstone inscriptions — a neat parable of the place of the intellectual in the land of saints and scholars. But the choice of Faustus as a name for this prodigy of learning introduces associations of forbidden knowledge bought at an unspeakable price, associations which work within the novel's frame of reference; Mullen's own bookishness works against him.

The novel has some good jokes (though the one about the drunken wake and the exhausted corpse is surely due for retirement), and some effective passages describing Irish landscape and "weak and god-damn effect on the minds and characters of the country people." Mullen is a talented and ambitious writer, but *Kelly* is too sophisticated for the profundity of myth and too arbitrary to be wholly satisfying as a novel.

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Making with the merry men

By J. A. Burrow

DAVID WILES:
The Early Plays of Robin Hood
97pp. D. S. Brewer. £12.
0 85991 082 2

The early history of the ballads of Robin Hood is obscure. The earliest surviving reference, dating from the 1370s, shows them already well known. In William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, Sloth confesses to knowing "rhymes of Robin Hood and Randolph Earl of Chester" better than the stories of Jesus and Mary; and Langland's contemporary Chaucer, evidently knew them too, for he uses the ballad phrase "merry men" in his burlesque story of Sir Thopas (described as "a good archer"). Shortly after Chaucer's death, an anonymous moralist speaks disapprovingly of men who would commonly rather "hear a tale or a song of Robin Hood" or of some ribaldry "than to hear mass or matins". Yet no texts survive from this early period. The oldest is the splendid *Robin Hood and the Monk*, preserved in a Canon of the mid-fifteenth century. Then from Tudor times we have *Robin Hood and the Potter* and the *Gest of Robin Hood*. The next source is the Percy Folio manuscript, dating from the mid-seventeenth century but preserving the archaic *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*.

These early Robin Hood ballads are full of good things. There is Little John's sceptical observation, in *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*, about "sweavens" or dreams:

"Sweavens are swift, master," quoth John.
"As the wind that blows o'er a hill;
For if it be never ad loud this night,
Tomorrow it may be still."

Or in the *Gest of Robin Hood*, the laconic dismissal of the unhappy Sheriff of Nottingham, who has just

spent a hard night in the greenwood ("hepe" is a hip or haw).

Now hath the sheriff sworn his oath,
And home he began to go;
He was as full of green wood
As ever was hepe of stone.

These products of the yeoman minstrelsy of late medieval and Tudor England can be read, with pleasure and ease, in Child's *English and Scottish Popular Ballads* or in the excellent recent collection by R. B. Dobson and J. Taylor, *Rymes of Robin Hood* (1976). It is, however, hardly possible to arrive at any secure conclusions about their origin and development. The extant poems must be no more than a surviving fraction of many wicker rhymes, which kept men from the Bible and the Mass. One can only be grateful that there were not all lost, as were the rhymes of Randolph Earl of Chester to which Langland also refers.

The case is even worse with the early plays of Robin Hood, to which David Wiles devotes his slender "hear a tale or a song of Robin Hood" or of some ribaldry "than to hear mass or matins". Yet no texts survive from this early period. The oldest is the splendid *Robin Hood and the Monk*, preserved in a Canon of the mid-fifteenth century. Then from Tudor times we have *Robin Hood and the Potter* and the *Gest of Robin Hood*. The next source is the Percy Folio manuscript, dating from the mid-seventeenth century but preserving the archaic *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*. These early Robin Hood ballads are full of good things. There is Little John's sceptical observation, in *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*, about "sweavens" or dreams: "Sweavens are swift, master," quoth John. "As the wind that blows o'er a hill; For if it be never ad loud this night, Tomorrow it may be still." Or in the *Gest of Robin Hood*, the laconic dismissal of the unhappy Sheriff of Nottingham, who has just

mentary remains of this dramatic tradition, which evidently ran parallel to the ballad tradition at least from the fifteenth century. From the surviving references, he attempts to reconstruct the folk Robin of the May games. He concludes that this Robin was a mock king or lord of misrule, closely associated with the Summer Lord or Lord of the May and representing the life-giving green of spring. Referring to Ladurie's *Civilization*, Wiles stresses the subversive tendencies of these folk games; but the descriptions he cites of Robin Hoods going from village to village with a band of merry men selling greenwood badges for the benefit of church funds suggest that the "misrule" may on occasion have been no more subversive than a Poppy Day. The trouble is, of course, that only those events which received some official recognition, approving or otherwise (one Edinburgh worker refers to the "wauld wicket man of Robene Hude"), can be known to us today. Perhaps the unmentionable occasions would have given more support to Wiles's anthropological speculations about fertility rituals. They might even have justified (for no surviving evidence does) his suggestion that the plays can be taken as an "institutional expression of egalitarian sentiment". Though the Robin Hood of the ballads hates avaricious churchmen and corrupt local officials, he gladly bows the knee to their masters, God and "Edward our king", and the Robin of the May games adopts the conventional hierarchical organization of bastard feudalism when he issues liveries to his retinue. Wiles is more convincing when he suggests that "the Robin Hood game" at Whitman was unmarried girls the chance to assert their group identity.

The only really substantial evidence for the actual content of an early Robin Hood play is provided by the twenty-one short couplets of the fifteenth-century "Paston" fragment; and Wiles's treatment of this crucial text leaves much to be desired. Since the manuscript records nothing but bare dialogue, without speakers' names or stage directions, the action of this play is hard to reconstruct. Child long ago identified the story as that of the Percy Folio ballad *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne*, where Robin meets and beheads a mysterious adversary dressed in a horse's skin, "top and all and mane"; and this identification more or less makes sense of the older fragment. Wiles sees in it two separate playslets, the second of which, he thinks, has nothing to do with the ballad; but his reconstruction does not improve on that of Dobson and Taylor, who follow Child. None of the editors, in fact, are as careful as they should be in studying this one precious nugget of hard evidence: they overlook the caber-tossing competition between Robin and Guy, for example.

In his general discussion of the text, Wiles allows his theories about ritual folk drama to dictate his conclusions. Although he accepts Child's identification of the fragment with *Robin Hood and the Sheriff*, he persists in treating it as if it represented "playlets designed for performance in village may-games", and invents a story of how Wood, Sir John's servant, picked the play up on his travels (in local drama being recorded in East Anglia) and "circulated it among the servants of one of the Paston households". This gratuitous speculation indicates the author's determination to defend the "folk" character of the plays. One almost expects him to interpret poor Wood as a green man. He does so, for as he suggests that his dramatic activities "took place without his master's blessing" — in flat defiance of the one thing that Sir John Paston's letter plainly says: "I have kept him this three year to play Sir George, and Robin Hood and the Sheriff of Nottingham". Although there can be no doubt that Robin Hood plays were performed at village May games, the Paston evidence

tells against any exclusively "folk" interpretation.

Wiles stresses throughout the importance of the dramatic tradition, and he rightly objects to the assumption that the plays always borrow from the ballads. It is indeed probable that Maid Marian, who does not appear in the early ballads, entered the company of Robin Hood first in the May games. Other suggestions of dramatic influence on the ballads are less convincing. Remarking the frequency in ballads of a contest between Robin and some stranger, a friar, shepherd or tanner who afterwards joins the "merry men", Wiles observes: "The combat motif in the ballad tradition has only one explanation, that it was inspired by some may-games in which combat played such an important part." But this is to ignore, as the author commonly does, the relation of the ballads to the Middle English romances, where the combat motif is of course customary.

This is a disappointing book on an excellent subject. The complete absence, in my copy, of the map forming Appendix 2 is hard to forgive in a book of ninety-seven pages costing twelve pounds. In so slight a volume, room could surely have been found to quote more of the early references, instead of simply listing their printed sources in an appendix. The author presents a full text of the three early plays, but these were already available in Dobson and Taylor's book. Discussion of the Robin Hood plays will always remain a speculative business, but one may hope for a more substantial study than this.

In *Tolkien and the Silmarils* (104pp. Thames and Hudson. £5.50. 0 500 01264 4) Randal Helms describes the sources of *The Silmarils*, both classical and Biblical, and its complex relationship with Tolkien's other major works, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and shows how it underlies them both.

Princely perspectives

By Martin Dodsworth

MARTIN SCOFIELD:
The Ghosts of Hamlet
The Play and Modern Writers
202pp. Cambridge University Press.
£16.50.
0 521 22735 6

Martin Scofield has written a carefully researched, interesting and above all critical book about *Hamlet*, outstanding by virtue of its liveliness and its readability. Its critical premise, however, is one that not all readers will care to accept, and it does radically affect the shape and force of what he has to say.

"What do I experience when I read or see *Hamlet*? It is a question which seeks ultimately a single answer: this is what I have experienced." The trouble with twentieth-century criticism, according to Mr Scofield, is that it presents us with too many conflicting views of the play. For him, criticism involves an attempt at "defining and agreeing on a reading that best establishes the views of one's own age". The last such coherent and generally accepted view of *Hamlet*, he says, was Coleridge's, what is needed now is a "shared modern sense of the play" that would serve for us in the way that Coleridge's did for the nineteenth-century reader. Finding the academic critics less than helpful in suggesting a single modern vantage-point for the play, Mr Scofield therefore turns to poets, novelists and even a philosopher in the modern tradition to provide an appropriate avenue of approach. He gives a most valuable account of the relationship between his chosen writers — Mallarmé, Laforgue, Eliot, Joyce, Lawrence and Kafka, to whom he adds in a subsidiary role Kierkegaard, Valéry and Claudel. On the basis of their insights he goes on to offer his own account.

All this talk of "the view of one's own age" is exciting and refreshingly different from the more enclosed perspectives of most academic writing, but it does lead to an unsatisfactory notion of critical procedure. If you disagree with Coleridge's view of the play and want to be taken seriously, then there must be an issue of principle at stake. It is not enough merely to say that Coleridge lived a long time ago and therefore needs to be replaced; critical opinions are not outdated by the mere fact of time's passing. Dr Johnson's adverse view of pastoral is still one to be considered, as indeed is Coleridge's view of *Hamlet*. If you disagree with him it must be because you think him wrong, as well as old-fashioned, and you have to argue that his view is wrong, that it is the product of evidence overlooked, of false emphasis or simple misinterpretation.

Disagreeing with a critic is not, of course, an activity entirely private to the person disagreeing. He may well, for example, be influenced by some of the preconceptions of his age; but if he takes this into account as qualifying what he has to say, Mr Scofield rather wants the critic to vaunt himself on his sympathy with his time, on the principle of "if you can't beat 'em join 'em". Actually seeing the object as it is, he says, "must remain the aim" in criticism, "unobtainable perhaps in a full scientific sense... but attainable in the limited sense that a particular age may achieve a predominant view of the object." There is something rather slippery about the formulation here, the emphasis in "must remain" being drained away in "unobtainable perhaps" and then pumped full of a quite contrary meaning in his cheerful (and quite unargued) "but attainable...". After all, a predominant view is not necessarily a true one, and doesn't have to represent itself as true. Any critic who sacrifices truth knowingly in order to arrive at that sort of view for an age is not the kind of critic we could all admire.

Of course, a critic does address himself especially to the readers of his time. Their misconceptions must be of particular interest to him, and in this sense he does himself write for his time, and seek to change the predominant view. But this is not his exclusive task, which must be simply to tell the truth as he understands it, and to use the timeless method of reasoning in order to achieve this.

I have laboured this point because it radically affects what gets done in *The Ghosts of Hamlet*. The implicit justification for approaching the play through the writings of Mallarmé and Co is that they have a deeper sympathy with the "modern" point of view. Certainly Scofield is able to show how their major insights into the play can be made to cohere. But there is a cost, and that is that we have to accept their modernity as in some sense paramount. He apologizes for not including

a chapter on Russian creative writers and their use of the play — notably Pasternak and Akhmatova — as though his chosen writers were quite representative. Yet Brecht is missing also. Was not his genius a "modern" genius too? He certainly had more to do with Shakespeare's play than did Kafka. Brecht adapted the play for radio, he got involved in an argument with Eric Bentley on the interpretation of the play, he wrote a sonnet about it (which has been excellently translated by John Willett) and a "practice scene" for actors, to go with Shakespeare's text, Kafka, on the other hand, refers to *Hamlet* once in his diary, and that is all.

In one sense this does not matter. *The Ghosts of Hamlet* is still an interesting book: and Brecht would have fitted in uncomfortably, whether you put him next to Kafka or Claudel. And the Kafka chapter is in fact a good one: there is plenty there about fathers and sons, identity and ambiguity, to make some suggestive parallels. Yet if the first half of the book is after all neither a comprehensive nor a representative account of the response to the play in modern creative writing, could it not perhaps have been a bit shorter? It is not that Mr Scofield is a long-winded author, but that on the contrary one senses him hurrying at points, and they are points where one suspects him to be a little bored with his task. For example, the chapter on Mallarmé is necessarily more involved than a simple interest in *Hamlet* requires. Scofield is an admirably steady guide in the labyrinth of *Igitur* and does indeed come out of it with what he went in to get. But the question is irresistible, whether the visit was necessary at all, and particularly, if it was, whether it ought not to have been a bit more leisurely.

Not surprisingly, the chapters on those who wrote in English are the best, though the one on Kafka falls not far short of them. This is the book to turn to for an account of what *Hamlet* meant to Lawrence, Joyce or Eliot.

There is a particularly sensitive account of the way in which Hamlet's father figures in the "familiar compound ghost" of *Little Gliding* — a reading that makes good sense, especially in the light of Lyndall Gordon's biography.

None of this, however, leaves much room for Mr Scofield's own account of the play, to which only the last fifty pages of his book are devoted. They are crisp and vigorous, but necessarily lack weight, not because in them modern academic criticism is disdained (it is not), nor because they have been rendered suspect by the tendency to self-confirmation in the design of the book as a whole (though that tendency must be conceded), but because there simply is not room enough to deal adequately with the complexities of Shakespeare's text. Something of Scofield's interpretation can be suggested by recalling that he finds Hamlet's attempt to prove the Ghost's word true a shallow one, believes that the Ghost itself is presented with a strong feeling of irony and moral uncertainty, and sees Hamlet's commitment to divine authority in the last act as quite unconvincing. It is a reading in the Cambridge tradition, sympathetically argued, but using the modern creative writers in an essentially rhetorical fashion, persuasively but without any necessary force. One has the sensation of having been in this part of the critical woods before — a sensation which writers on *Hamlet* find it hard not to induce if they are honestly intent on the object as it is in itself. In the end Scofield resorts to drawing a parallel between Hamlet's world and that of Montaigne, and we are back with J.M. Robertson and the views of 1919.

Because he writes well and because the points he makes are worth making and here contribute to a whole which is his and no one else's, it doesn't matter. There is plenty to learn and plenty to be provoked by in *The Ghosts of Hamlet*: and Mr Scofield's next book can be awaited with pleasure and confidence.



As she was spoken

By Vivian Salmon

FAUSTO CERCIIGNANI:
Shakespeare's Works and Elizabethan Pronunciation
432pp. Clarendon Press: Oxford University Press. £37.50
0 19 811937 2

Unlike the novelist or biographer, whose medium is the written language, the dramatist is obliged to create an imitation of the spoken language of his time in the same medium; but while the grammar and vocabulary of that language remain reasonably accessible to later generations, its pronunciation does not. Although we accept that Elizabethan drama must be uttered in the accents of the twentieth century, most of us — lay and specialist — must have speculated at some time on the exact nature of Elizabethan speech, and would welcome an authentic reconstruction of its sound patterns such as appears to be offered by this book. Unfortunately for the general reader, it will offer him little assistance without a good deal of effort on his part. This is a book for specialists, and even for them a difficulty presents itself at the very outset in so far as the author does not make it altogether clear what they are to expect from him.

The title does not give a precise idea of the nature of the book's contents, and its vagueness is not remedied by the somewhat contradictory statements of the author's aims at the beginning. Fausto Cercignani claims to "present... a more precise picture of Shakespeare's pronunciation than has emerged from previous investigations"; but later admits that the work "can hardly be conceived as an attempt to reconstruct Shakespeare's own pronunciation... this is now just beyond recovery. Nevertheless, he believes, it is possible to ascertain... to what extent

Shakespeare's works afford reliable evidence of the types of speech which were current in London during his lifetime."

It is understandable, then, that the title is not more specific, and the book's material is organized clearly enough. Taking as his starting point a phonetic inventory of late Middle English, Cercignani examines each segment in turn and attempts to elucidate the development of its phonetic realization from the mid-fifteenth to the early seventeenth century. Where possible, he begins by citing the evidence of orthoepists, phoneticians and spelling reformers of the period. He then cites a mass of evidence from the Shakespearean texts, which, like rhymes and puns, can testify to the dramatist's own usage or, like graphic peculiarities, can illustrate either the dramatist's or his printer's.

Having based his conclusions about the "normal" development of late Middle English phonemes on this evidence, he then lists, and discusses, all the variant manifestations which occur in the Shakespearean texts. He also considers the negative evidence for phonological developments which are known to have emerged in the seventeenth century, but whose status in Shakespeare's lifetime is controversial. His conclusions tend towards the conservative; he does not find, for example, that the radical changes which led to the development of the vowels in present-day Southern English — *eat* and *tea* — are attested in Shakespearean texts. He concludes his work with an account of the vowels of unstressed syllables, where, in the case of vowel reductions, he has to rely to a large extent on unusual spellings or, in the case of vowel losses, on metrical evidence.

Cercignani's approach to his subject is, therefore, by way of a synthesis, combining both internal and external evidence. In his use of external evi-

dence he is heavily indebted (as he fully acknowledges) to the definitive account of the orthoepists in Eric Dobson's *English Pronunciation 1500-1700*, while in his use of the texts as evidence he is indebted to the late Helge Kokeritz's *Shakespeare's Pronunciation*. Dobson and Kokeritz came to different conclusions about the nature of Elizabethan speech, the former regarded it as relatively conservative, sometimes retaining, for example, such an "archaic" phoneme (for Southern English) as the volative *schwa* in *loch*; the latter believed it to be far advanced in the direction of modern Received Pronunciation. It is Dobson's conclusions that Cercignani supports, with minor reservations; his reasons for opposing Kokeritz's are set out in detail and comprehensively. He takes the opportunity to discuss, and disagree with, Kokeritz's views on such controversial issues as the reliability of graphic peculiarities as evidence of Shakespeare's own pronunciation. Since Kokeritz is the most recent large-scale discussion in English of the sound-system of Elizabethan English, it is not surprising that Cercignani concludes that "the internal evidence provided by Shakespeare's works requires complete revision and fresh evaluation".

"None will fail to be impressed by the devoted hard work which has produced this book; but the extent of the author's success will be judged differently, in accordance with the reader's theoretical viewpoint. Most contemporary linguists handle phonological change in terms of 'classical' phonemes, or of generative phonology; in the former case, the linguist draws up inventories of discrete sound segments, or phonemes, which constitute the sound systems of a language at different periods of its history, and by comparing two or more systems, is able to specify the changes which have occurred in the interval. To some extent, Cercignani uses these methods, since he draws up phoneme inventories for

Late Middle and Early Modern English — that is, English as it was spoken (according to the available evidence) about 1450 and 1600. But he fails to draw really enlightening conclusions because, instead of comparing the two systems as whole entities, he deals with the development of each phoneme in isolation. This was the traditional method of historical phonology, but as A.C. Gimson, who Cercignani cites, remarks (in his introduction to the *Pronunciation of English*) "It is convenient to study sound changes in terms of particular phonemes or sounds, but it is misleading to ignore the relationship of the sound units to the system within which they function... Many sound changes can be explained only by reference to a re-adjustment of the phonetic relationships of the phonemes as a whole".

His treatment of individual sounds in isolation also prevents Cercignani from achieving his stated aim of assessing the reliability of Shakespearean evidence on "the types of speech which were current in London". This remark would lead one to expect a coherent account of such types, but as it is features characteristic of regional dialects or social classes are noted only in association with the individual phonemes. Unfortunately, it is difficult for the reader to gain an overview of these varieties of Elizabethan speech, as there is no subject-index to guide him. Other features of Cercignani's approach which are not fully satisfactory are his use of narrative exposition where tabulation would have been simpler, shorter, and easier to follow, and his reliance on a phonetic notation which is not consistent with either the usage of British scholars like Eric Dobson and Charles Barber, who have recently written on Elizabethan phonology, or with the types of notation used by generative phonologists.

For linguists of this persuasion, who would make use of a very different approach to the description of Elizabethan English, speech sounds arise from the application of abstract "rules" which specify the occurrence, or absence, of individual distinctive phonological features, such as voicing and rounding. Sound change results from some alteration in the application of the rules; a rule may be deleted, a new one added, or existing rules may be applied in a different order. Accounts of sound change can therefore be much more explicit than is possible with the approach of classical phonemics. But although this procedure is sometimes claimed to be more valuable because it is "explanatory", it may be little more than a notational device. Historical linguists working in the generative tradition are also concerned, however, with more genuine "explanations", in so far as they postulate the existence of certain "natural" phonological processes which recur in time and space; and Cercignani might usefully have exploited his data to furnish examples of these processes at work in fifteenth and sixteenth-century English.

There is one respect, however, in which Cercignani's work is of interest not only to historical linguists but also to theoreticians of language in general, and that is in the emphasis he places (following Dobson's lead) on the importance of variation. In recent years, urban dialectologists like William Labov have shown not only the significance of linguistic variation, but how it can be integrated into linguistic theory. Cercignani's well-organized listing of Early Modern English variations is only one of the features of his book which will make it a valuable work of reference for all those interested in the history of English, and the wealth of citations of Shakespearean forms which he provides will make the work useful to literary and textual critics as well. The printers deserve our gratitude for coping so splendidly with such a difficult text, and the Clarendon Press for making the work available to scholars.

Family happiness

By Stephen Koss

Grown Ups
Lyceum Theatre, New York

The autumn season on Broadway is rumoured to have been a relatively distinguished one. The ostensible criterion for this judgment is that while costly musicals have quickly folded, "serious" plays linger on, keeping the computerized ticket machines happily purring at half a dozen box offices. Upon closer inspection, however, the situation is far from cheery. Of the major dramatic successes, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Dresser* are transplants from the London stage. Two others — *Crimes of the Heart* and *Mass Appeal* — are recycled productions from off-Broadway's Manhattan Theatre Club, their defects illuminated by the harsh glare of the Great White Way. There has also been a pair of creaking vehicles for the veteran talents of Claudette Colbert and Katharine Hepburn.

Conspicuously absent have been those wise-cracking comedies that have been the staple of past seasons and, for better or worse, the hallmark of New York theatrical craftsmanship. Jules Feiffer, with his well-earned reputation for social satire, might have been expected to remedy the deficiency, and *Grown Ups* purports to be "a new play". That label is misleading on both counts. The sixth of Feiffer's works for the stage, the effort actually dates from 1974, and was only recently disinterred by the Loeb Drama Center at Harvard University. And, despite the December chill in its veins, it retains a markedly cartoon-like quality.

Grown Ups does not so much tell the story as describe the embitterment of a middle-class, middle-aged New York Times reporter, struggling to break free from the trammels of family existence. Jake, played to shambling perfection by Bob Daly, was drafted out of Queens and eventually navigated the psychological straits to an apartment on West End Avenue. His young sister migrated to bourgeois splendour in New Rochelle, a commuters' paradise. Jake has a wife whose education he superintends by correcting her malapropisms and by giving her Agatha Christie novels. "I can't help what I am," she whines. They have a nine-year-old daughter, who preys on his affection.

To complete the cast, he has two stereotypical parents. "The only way to win with them is to get out of town," he tells his sister. He himself has got out of — or, more accurately, into — town, but still cannot get them off his unnumbered conscience. The climax of the play, which amounts to the whole of the plot, is a histrionic repudiation of all responsibilities: professional, filial, matrimonial and parental.

When we first encounter Jake's parents among the gleaming formica fixtures of sister Marilyn's kitchen, they seem cloying but otherwise inoffensive. Soon they reveal their deadliness. Weak-willed Jack exists to echo his wife's banal prejudices, to cater to her "flashes", and to inquire "What's new?" for want of conversation. His teetotal wife, alert to the bottle of "poison" that he keeps at the top of his bookshelf ("behind William Shriver"), is the American equivalent of John Osborne's Nellie Beatrice. She "doesn't have the breath to argue", but always manages none the less.

Quite simply, Jack and Helen represent the attitudes and affections that can be summed up as "Rivendale". Jake's put-upon sister represents the survival of their values in more affluent surroundings. Jake, writing a book on "the moral and ethical disintegration of the American dream — basically, represents nothing so much as a mounting sense of his own inadequacy, emotional as well as intellectual.

commentary

Budapest spring

By Julie Curtis

If Winter Comes
BBC TV

BBC Birmingham's production of Janos Nyiri's play was originally scheduled for October, to coincide with the twenty-fifth anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian uprising, but has now assumed a different relevance in the light of recent developments in Poland. The play is set in Hungary in 1954, at a time when Premier

Imre Nagy's attempts to introduce a programme of liberalization after Stalin's death were encountering opposition from the still-powerful Stalinists under Rakosi. It describes a time when important choices had to be made about the future of Communism, a time of hopeful discussions not unlike the Prague spring.

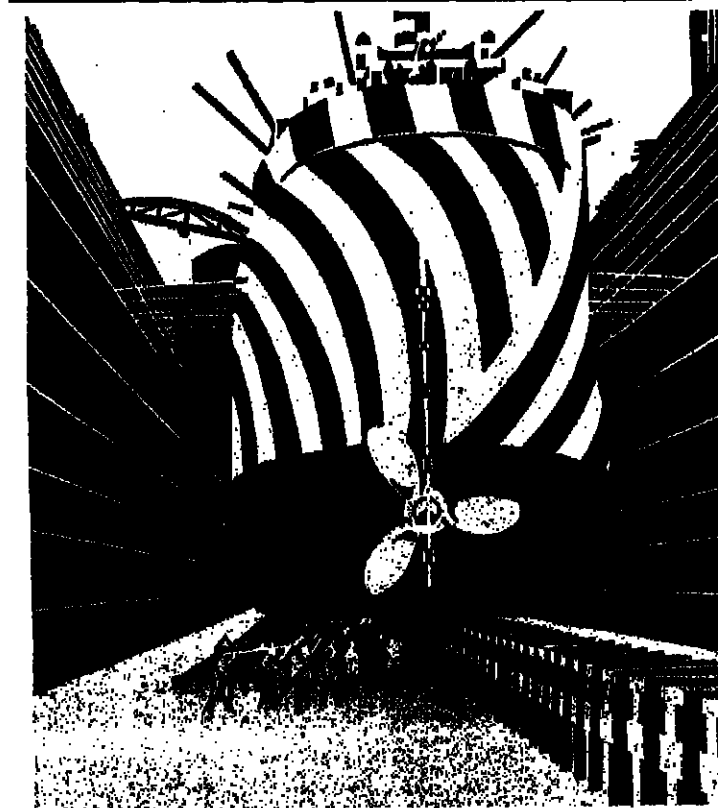
The members of a class of drama students are asked by their professor to act out the most important event of their lives. Károly (Hilton McRae) reveals that he has fallen in love with Ilona, whom his unbending fellow-student Ozswath (Denis Lawson) exposes as the bourgeois daughter of a brutal right-wing colonel. On stage with the student Cheppi, Károly day by day re-enacts his relationship with Ilona as it develops, until Ozswath, impatient with romantic love and Károly's compromise with the bourgeoisie, denounces Ilona to the secret police for illegally living in Budapest. Apart from Ilona, all the characters are fervent communists, so that the conflict between the idealistic Károly and the hard-liner Ozswath is not intended to be, as the British viewer might be inclined to expect, a straightforward matter of good and evil. Ozswath's passionate conviction that Károly cannot remain "with" the communists if he takes up with Ilona is not unfounded, and when Károly, outraged at the betrayal, asks "Can this be right?", he is no more capable of providing an answer than Ozswath is.

At the centre of the play stands the ambivalent figure of Moroi, the drama professor, a leading actor-director and member of the Central Committee, played by Paul Scofield. In the converted courtroom which serves as their studio, he acts as arbiter of the students' diatribe-ments. Certain aspects of Moroi's character are derived from the real-life figure of Tamás Major, whose work both Nyiri and the director Peter Szady would have known before they went into exile in 1956. Major was director of the National Theatre in Budapest from 1945, a post which he uniquely succeeded in retaining through almost all the crises of the 1950s. Moroi, however, is portrayed not as an opportunist but as a devious, complex and ultimately sympathetic figure. He is made uncomfortable by Károly's innocence; and although the play ends in one way pessimistically, with Károly only able to suggest that Károly and Ilona should flee to the West, there is still a glimmer of hope in his question: "If winter comes, can spring be far behind?"

If *Winter Comes* contrives to be about the theatre as well as about political choice. At every turn art and reality merge, separate, question each other. Scofield delicately but disconcertingly over-acts in order to portray Moroi feigning drunken cynicism; the students turn real life into acting in order to understand it better, and Moroi, whose only contacts outside the studio are with the party elite, in turn seems only able to come to terms with reality when it is mediated through his students' performances. As Cheppi plays Ilona for Károly, cheer from the children. Instructed to pose as a statue, he gives a staid rendering of a homicidal Hunchback of Notre Dame. As his sister self, he is given to catching flies and eating them.

The jokes are basically of two kinds. For adults there is the smutty variety. For the children there is blood and guts throughout — severed limbs flying across the stage, dripping intestines, gushing veins. On the whole the smut was not much appreciated by anyone the afternoon I was there, and the excessive bloodiness was certainly not enjoyed by the adults. There is, however, a popular transition sequence when the donor and recipient blood is recovered, alternately.

Nyiri's strength as a playwright lies in his ability to construct dialogue which sounds unforced even when it is dealing with large issues of moral choice. Politics, served well by Peter Szady's concentrated direction and fast performances by all the cast, Nyiri has given us a play of rare quality.



Edward Wadsworth's woodcut "Drydocked for sailing and painting" is reproduced from Art at Auction 1980-81, (49pp. Sotheby Publications. £18.95. 0 85667 138 X); it was sold last June at Sotheby's, London for £1,600.

In jugular vein

By Lucy Micklethwait

Dracula
Albany Theatre

Michael Bogdanov's and Phil Woods's version of *Dracula* is aptly subtitled *A Pain in the Neck*. The entertainment gets off to a promising start, it is true, with a butler asking people their names and announcing them in a stentorian voice (later, as Prince Charles and Lord Lucan). Everyone is advised to wipe their feet on garlic-soaked bat mats. There are gingerbread crosses for sale and Dracula badges, and you can climb on stage to buy cups of Bull's Blood ("red wine for tough adults") and Flzy Blood ("cherryade for the young and succulent"). There are real cloves of garlic ("Just in case he goes for your jugular, Madam"). Everyone joins in a couple of choruses to "Daisy Daisy" and settles down to enjoy two hours of jolly audience participation. As the performance went to, we were disappointed.

The show supposes that an aristocratic group (and the butler) are to give a performance of Bram Stoker's tale by way of evening entertainment. There is a twist, for the gentleman who was meant to play the bloodthirsty Count has been dismembered offstage, and it is Dracula himself who pops up out of the stalls and insists on playing the part. The story is loosely based on the novel, with Sir Jonathan Harker, the intrepid and guileless estate agent, arriving at Castle Dracula to sell to the Count a ruined and haunted property.

next to the lunatic asylum in Whitby. As the same set — one bed and one chair, a flight of steps and a large window — does duty for Castle Dracula in Transylvania and for the lunatic asylum, the plot is not easy to follow, and the business of the six coffins remains a complete mystery.

The cast do their best with the appalling script. "Sir" Anthony Smees is clean-cut and energetically British as Harker. "Vacuum" Terry Tapping, as the Dutch "vampire" expert Professor Van Helsing produces a rather more convincing accent than Dracula — who is about as awe-inspiring as a Transylvanian waiter in Greek Street. The Dutchman has the best lines, relying on the well-tried formula of the earnest foreigner who gets his words mixed up: "I want to hear a mouse dropping". Dracula's manservant, played by the butler (Micky O'Donoghue), gets the laughs and cheers from the children. Instructed to pose as a statue, he gives a staid rendering of a homicidal Hunchback of Notre Dame. As his sister self, he is given to catching flies and eating them.

The jokes are basically of two kinds. For adults there is the smutty variety. For the children there is blood and guts throughout — severed limbs flying across the stage, dripping intestines, gushing veins. On the whole the smut was not much appreciated by anyone the afternoon I was there, and the excessive bloodiness was certainly not enjoyed by the adults. There is, however, a popular transition sequence when the donor and recipient blood is recovered, alternately.

Nyiri's strength as a playwright lies in his ability to construct dialogue which sounds unforced even when it is dealing with large issues of moral choice. Politics, served well by Peter Szady's concentrated direction and fast performances by all the cast, Nyiri has given us a play of rare quality.

New Oxford books: History

God's Playground

A History of Poland
Norman Davies

The writing of Polish history, like Poland itself, has frequently fallen prey to interested parties. By adopting a sceptical stance towards all existing interpretations, the author attempts to bring a strong dose of common sense to his theme. This is the most comprehensive survey of the subject in English. Two volumes £27.50 each

Endurance and Endeavour

Russian History 1812-1980
J.N. Westwood

This is a valuable survey of Russian history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries that deserves to be widely read. *American Historical Review*. "A serious and useful introduction to modern Russian History. Soviet Studies. This revised edition includes two new chapters on Khrushchev and Brezhnev, with important additional bibliographical material. Second edition £17.50. paper covers £7.95 *Short Oxford History of the Modern World*

Death and the Enlightenment

Changing Attitudes to Death among Christians and Unbelievers in Eighteenth-Century France
John McManners

"Professor McManners... is one of those rather rare historians who still believe that the history of religion should be about religion, and that it is not some junior branch of social history... a companionate, beautifully written and deeply learned study of intellectual and popular attitudes to death in eighteenth-century France... a book that would make an admirable and convincing gift." *Richard Cobb in The Guardian*. £17.60

The King's Debts

Finance and Politics in France, 1589-1661
Richard Bonney

The author emphasizes the inefficiency of the French method of deficit finance and the parasitic nature of the financial system on the economy. Whereas earlier accounts have simply stressed the role of financial corruption, Dr Bonney demonstrates the impossibility of achieving lasting reforms in wartime, the crown's reliance on a restricted financial market, and the importance of the social framework which made radical overhaul of the system difficult to achieve even in peacetime. £22.50

Irish Population, Economy, and Society

Essays in Honour of the late K.H. Connell
Edited by J.M. Goldstrom and L.A. Clarkson

Through his writing and teaching the late Professor Connell made a seminal contribution to the study of Irish economic and social history. This volume of essays honours his memory and acknowledges his influence on the development of the subject. All the essays are concerned with Ireland after 1600 and several explore themes that were central to Connell's own work. £17.50

Oxford
University Press

Death of the hero

By Oswyn Murray

MARY RENAULT:
Funeral Games

256pp. John Murray. £6.95.
0 7195 38863

With *Funeral Games* Mary Renault completes her trilogy on Alexander the Great. In *Fire From Heaven* she took a favourite subject of antiquity, the education of the hero: two contemporaries of Alexander, Onesicritus and Mithras of Pella, had already tried it, with the advantage of having actually been present; but they are little more than names. Mary Renault's account was magnificently convincing, offering an unforgettable portrait of Alexander's wild mother, Olympias, and witty sketches of such minor characters as Aristotle and Demosthenes. The *Persian Boy* followed Alexander on his conquests across the world. It was remarkable for being cast in the form of the memoirs of a Persian eunuch, favourite of Darius and Alexander: this unity of viewpoint enabled Mary Renault to give an entirely favourable account of Alexander, ignoring the tensions aroused by his adoption of Persian habits among the Macedonians who comprised his court and his army; ultimately the picture was too sentimental, but it was a virtuoso performance. In *Funeral Games* we are given an account of the decade following Alexander's death, written in chronicle

form, as a series of vignettes of the struggles he left behind.

"If he were dead the whole world would stink of his corpse", said the Andanian politician Demosthenes; and this is clearly the view of Mary Renault. She regards the age as one of murder, treachery and greed, without meaning or interest; her aim is merely to dramatize the violence and the deaths, and to show the inevitable disintegration, the return to Macedonian customs, when her hero has departed. The result is frankly a novel without a centre, whose interest lies only in its colours: Mary Renault has always been one for laying them on thick. The book, though a good light read, does not stand up to the earlier works in power of conception. This reveals of course an important aspect of Mary Renault's art: she is a hero-worshipper; for all her accuracy of research and vividness of narrative she cannot create a world without a hero.

In a sense therefore her vision is historically accurate, if artistically unsatisfactory. The period was one in which the world created by Alexander's death was the most important single factor: the novel would have pointed up this dimension if Mary Renault had concentrated more on the missing king, and ended perhaps with 306 BC, when after seventeen years the first of the successor dynasts dared usurp that title which belonged to Alexander. But this is only part of the story; for the vacuum allowed the creation of a world culture, far more important

than any which Alexander had conceived with his facile rituals of unity — a fusion of Greece and the Orient which ultimately produced Christianity. And even to contemporaries it was a world of deep if uncomfortable meanings. Mary Renault mentions in passing Hieronymus of Cardia, the greatest of the lost historians of antiquity, whose pale ghost peers through the mundane prose of Diodorus — a writer with the power and range of Thucydides. In extreme old age, from the vantage point of the more settled and more boring world of the Successor Kingdoms, he sums up the lessons of the period:

Who, taking thought for the uncertainties of human life, would not be astonished at the alternating ebb and flow of fortune? Or who, putting his trust in the power he enjoys when Fortune favours him, would adopt a bearing too high for mortal weakness? For human life, as if some god were at the helm, moves in a cycle through good and evil alternately for all time. So the strangeness is not that some unforeseen event takes place, but that not everything is unpredictable. This is also a good reason for admitting the claim of history, for in the inconstancy and irregularity of events history furnishes a corrective to both the arrogance of the fortunate and the despair of the destitute.

Here for the first time Fortune, or chance, is set at the centre of history, and for the first time Tolstoy's great truth is formulated, that the lesson of history is the denial of historical causation.

Under the veneer

By Ruth Dudley Edwards

GEORGE HARDINGE (Editor):
Winter's Crimes 13

224pp. Macmillan. £5.50.
0 333 31831 5

This series goes from strength to strength, rendering volume-by-volume comparisons inappropriate. (They are antipathetic anyway to the spirit of crime compendia.) Moreover, there is not one disappointing story among the eleven in this, the thirteenth anthology, so comparisons of quality within it would also be improper: it serves no useful purpose to set against H. R. F. Keating's gentle, humorous tale of naughty doings in the newspaper obituary department Miles Tripp's terrifying semi-supernatural tale of the consequences of visitations by a dead dog.

In fact the range of the volume causes problems for the reader bent on taking it at a sitting. A few of the stories are suitable for late night reading. Colin Dexter's deliciously twisted tale of confidence tricksters, and another of Ellis Peter's enchanting pieces of historical detection, will interfere with no one's sleep. By contrast, James McClure, in his agonizing evocation of a frightened and

hate-filled paralysed girl, promises, like Miles Tripp, an uneasy night for all but the very hard-boiled.

Then there are the appalling marriages — unwise reading at a time of domestic disharmony: it is hard to decide whether John Wainwright's monstrous egoist is more or less nasty a husband than Margaret York's vicious brute. Elizabeth Ferrars and Lionel Davidson sink different exploratory shafts into the evil that can lurk under the most respectable veneer. How, after these stories, to look other than distrustfully at one's best friends and neighbours? It is almost a relief to turn to Desmond Lowden's simple villain doing his corpse-disposing job as best he can, or to Jennie Melville's sympathetic tale of mental illness.

There is something here for everyone disposed to respect the impossibility in a review of saying more than this about any short crime story before the reader settles down to it. But where to settle down? The collection should be read at a time of careful choosing. It is made for daylight. The fears it raises about human nature should be dissipated by the *bonhomie* of the present season, the terror of the most macabre stories dispelled by the afternoon's old movies. And at the end of the day one would be left with the pleasant certainty that the short crime story is alive, well and in capable hands.

Criminal proceedings

By T. J. Blynon

DICK FRANCIS:

Twice Shy
249pp. Michael Joseph. £6.95.
0 7181 2056 6

Schoolmaster Jonathan Derry, who often shoots at Bixley and once made the Olympic team, finds himself by accident in possession of three mysterious computer tapes which are being looked for by some exceedingly rough and nasty individuals.

As might be expected with Dick Francis, horses eventually turn out to be at the bottom of it all, but their physical presence is not so noticeable as usual. We are given a simple course in computing, the narration is as marvellously fluent as ever, and the depiction of the psychopaths is as painfully convincing. But the author's decision to break the book into two longish short stories, seems a mistake.

MAGDALENE NABB:

Death of an Englishman
172pp. Collins. £6.25.
0 007 231298 0

Crusty English bachelor with suspicious habits is found dead in his ground-floor flat in Florence. Though almost incapacitated with influenza, and longing to get home to Sicily for Christmas, the local Carabinieri Marshal investigates, assisted by an ingenious police cadet and — as far as national differences allow — two detectives from Scotland Yard. It is, inexplicably, where it's at; detective story-wise, at the moment, and this is certainly a worthy addition to the corpus. Neatly plotted and well written, with an affectionate look at Florence and its inhabitants, it is a more than sparkling debut.

MICHAEL KENYON:

Zigzag
218pp. Collins. £6.50.
0 007 231981 0

Chief Inspector Henry Peckover, policeman and cockney postmaster, is sent to Dublin to pick up a prisoner — a stockbroker who has kidnapped his own daughter. But the prisoner

evades his clutches and Peckover remains unwillingly in Dublin, where he is enlisted in a crusade to stem the flood of pornography that is threatening to leave the Emerald Isle some six feet deep in the magazines *Lip*, *Limb* and *Horn* and in blue films such as *Bathnight in Ballycun* (in US *Rub-a-Dub Tub Tricks*) or *College Colleens* (in US *Graduation Girls*). Hilarious humour adorns a plot that grips like a clothespeg.

ELIZABETH FERRARS:

Thinner Than Water
182pp. Collins. £6.25.
0 007 231895 4

We have met Virginia Freer and her charming but delinquent ex-husband Felix before in Elizabeth Ferrars's novels. Here they are — somewhat tactlessly — invited to witness a friend's second wedding, as they had earlier witnessed the first. However, when the reception ends with the discovery of a corpse, and further events rapidly begin to prove the truth of the title, their presence turns out to be useful, as Felix unravels the problem before the police. Pleasing and undemanding tale, neatly and professionally fitted together.

MICHAEL DELAHAYE:

The Sale of Lot 236
228pp. Constable. £6.95.
0 09 464270 2

English fresco expert working in Florence is blackmailed by a gang of Italian crooks into helping them look for an unknown crucifixion by Cimabue. Synopsis doesn't sound too promising, but Michael Delahaye nevertheless has made a brilliant start with his first novel. The plot is as thick as minestrone and as tangled as a plateful of spaghetti; narration is accomplished neatly and deftly; the whole spiced with some delightfully fascinating information on medieval Italian art; and on how best to remove a fresco from the wall of your local church.

PORTUGAL: INLAND 154p. ABBAD 179
SECOND-CLASS POSTAGE PAID AT NEW YORK
POSTMASTER: SEND NO POSTAGE NECESSARY IF MAILED IN THE UNITED STATES
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10017

to the editor

Railway Timetables

Sir, — I hesitate to ask for further space in your columns but so great is the volume of correspondence which arrives daily from railway travellers and readers of railway timetables that I am persuaded that I must do so.

It appears that those of your readers intending to travel to La Tour de Carol-Envelg by the *Catalan-Talgo* may have been misled not only by a sentence in my review (October 23) of *British Rail's Continental Timetable* (Summer 1981), but also by my letter of clarification (November 6), which has made matters worse.

To start with, there is the question of the station's name. My correspondents (but not *The Times Atlas*, which does not mention the places) tell me that Latour-de-Carol, as they write it, and Envelg (not Envelg, as misspelled in my letter, though not, fortunately, in my review) are the names of the village, some two kilometres apart. The Gare Internationale is between them. *Cook's Continental Timetable* gives the station's name as Latour-de-Carol but *British Rail* calls it La Tour de Carol-Envelg. Passengers for this station should evidently be prepared for argument when they attempt to identify their destination to the booking-clerk.

Luckily, it is almost impossible for them to miss the station altogether — and this brings me to the second point. Not only does the Paris-Alicante service fail to "rush straight through", since La Tour de Carol-Envelg is not on that line at all, but the line which does serve this station marks the end of the French standard-gauge track and the beginning of the Spanish broad-gauge track (or vice versa, depending on your direction), so that all passengers must alight here to change trains.

Furthermore, La Tour de Carol-Envelg is the terminus for a third line, a narrow-gauge track, winding through the French part of that area known as the Cerdagne (in Spanish, Cerdania; in Catalan, Cerdanya), over the Col de la Parche down to Villefrance-de-Conflent, where it connects with a standard-gauge branch line from Perpignan. *British Rail* gives none of these details and I am indebted to Mr de Paris of Dorset for this information. Passengers who may find themselves looking bewilderingly at La Tour de Carol-Envelg may therefore pass the time by contemplating three gauges of track lying side by side.

Last, the remark in my letter that La Tour de Carol-Envelg might be a junction for some autonomous region (I was tempted by British Rail's decision-tree into forgetting about Andorra) was in fact truer than I dared to suppose (or would have dared, had I then known how many letters, postcards, telegrams and telephone calls my observation would attract). The Cerdagne does boast a virtually autonomous town, Spanish but entirely surrounded by French territory and connected to the rest of Spain by a "neutral" road.

My correspondents tell me that the Cerdagne is the only wide, high valley in the Pyrenees, with remarkably beautiful scenery and many lovely churches, often furnished with carved wooden figures. The floor of the valley is four thousand feet above sea level and the air fresh and invigorating. I will not take up more of your space by quoting the extracts from French, Spanish, and Catalan poetry with which my correspondents illustrate their letters, nor by attaching any of the photographs, sketches and watercolours they append, but it is clear from the enthusiasm and passionate exaltation with which they write that La Tour de Carol-Envelg must exert an extraordinarily beneficial influence.

May I suggest that some department of the TLR set about organizing a special excursion to La Tour de Carol-Envelg to rejuvenate ex-

hausted readers and contributors? British Rail might be persuaded to devise an Awayday, in collaboration with French and Spanish National Railways, to mark the end of your distinguished time as editor. We might toast you where there is a wineglass symbol (buffet service of drinks and cold snacks) and make speeches after knives and forks in squares (tray meals).

JANET MORGAN.
Home Close, Elsfield, Oxfordshire.

'The Bookshops of London'

Sir, — Ronald Gray's letter (November 27) might give the impression that our recently published book, *The Bookshops of London*, by Martha Redding Pease, complains of the paucity of bookshops in the capital. I wonder if Mr Gray has seen the book — or only Lindsay Duguid's review of it (November 13). That review, quite legitimately, took the opportunity of discussing the availability of books in London, but such questions arise from, and not in, Ms Pease's book. The book is strictly a guide to London bookshops, and expresses no views on their sufficiency. It does, however, track down nearly 500 of them, and I doubt if the addition of "mail-order and by appointment" outlets, as recommended by Mr Gray, would make the book "several times as big". If Mr Gray is right the result would be rather unwieldy, since *The Bookshops of London* is already 390 pages long.

MICHAEL MASON.
Junction Books Limited, 15 St John's Hill, London SW11 1TN.

Anne Thackeray Ritchie

Sir, — A belated footnote to Claire Tomalin's review of Winifred Gérin's *Anne Thackeray Ritchie* (July 10): A. C. Gordon's somewhat obscurely published memoir of the Victorian headmaster and classicist William Gordon McCabe (1841-1920) contains dozens of letters from Anne Thackeray which, so far as I can tell, have not been referred to by her biographers and critics. It might therefore be worth pointing out that her last novel, *Mrs Dymally* (1885), which your reviewer and Mrs Gérin agree in considering undoubtedly her finest, may owe some of its merits to McCabe. He revised the book in manuscript — it was "handed over to me to break my own sweet will upon" as he put it in a letter to R. A. Austen-Leigh (see A. C. Gordon's *Memoirs and Memorials of William Gordon McCabe* [1925], vol 2, p 240-1) — and would have been just the reader to supply a touch of that school discipline which is so seldom found in Anne Thackeray's works.

IAN JACKSON.
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The first prize in the 1981 National Poetry Championship, organized by the Poetry Society in association with BBC Radio 3, was awarded to James Berry for his poem "Fantasy of an African Boy". The second prize went to Pamela Gillman for "Journey" and the third to Paul Groves for "Anniversary Soak". These, and other prize-winning poems, will be published in the mid-January issue of *Poetry Review*.

To all American readers and subscribers
If you have any difficulties concerning your subscription to or the distribution of the TLR in the United States, please get in touch with Ms Nora Nield at Times Newspapers of Great Britain Inc., 401 East 42nd Street, New York 10017; telephone (212) 966 9230.

The Identity of B. Traven

Sir, — Savkar Altinel (December 18) perpetrates at the same time an unnecessary complication and an unjustified simplification of the mystery of the writer B. Traven in the review of his novel *The Caravel* — which was incidentally first published in this country as long ago as 1936.

It is misleading to say that Will Wyatt and his BBC researchers have been "able to identify him as one Otto Wienecke, who had an earlier career as an actor and anarchist in Germany under the name of 'Ret Marut' before leaving Europe for good in the 1920s to start a new life as a novelist on the other side of the Atlantic". The surname of the real person whom Wyatt has identified with both Marut and Traven is actually Feige, since his father Adolf Feige married his mother Homina Wienecke a few months after his birth. He was always called Otto Feige, and used his mother's maiden name only later as one of his many pseudonyms.

On the other hand, it should be said that, despite the brilliant investigations of Wyatt and his colleagues (and their predecessors), there is still no conclusive proof of the multiple identification, and that there are still awkward gaps between the disappearance of Feige in 1904 and the appearance of Marut in 1907 and between the disappearance of Marut in 1924 and the appearance of Traven in Mexico in 1925. Perhaps something more definite will emerge in time for the centenary of his birth on February 23, 1982, but it seems unlikely.

NICOLAS WALTER.
134 Northumberland Road, Harrow, Middlesex.

Take me to your reader

By Bill Buford

The Arts Council announced last week that its grant for the forthcoming year would be increased by seven and a quarter per cent to £26 million. While this is less than was hoped for, the Council reported that by making a number of cuts in its own administration, it should be able to sustain most of its major financial commitments. At a time when virtually every subsidized institution is desperately trying to accommodate cuts in government spending, the arts in general have somehow managed to pull through once again.

In literature, the case is a little different; indeed, ostensibly quite a bit better. There is actually more money to spend. Or, at least, there seems to be. The allocation for the Literature Panel next year will actually be only two and a quarter per cent greater than what it had for 1981-82. But this percentage fails to represent how much money the Panel will have to work with; largely because of the increase of funds made available by the two major cuts proposed for the new financial year: to the New Fiction Society (saving around £40,000) and to the literary subscription scheme for literary magazines (saving around £40,000 to £50,000).

It is ironic that both projects are being cut when in principle both are so consistent with the new policy to which the Panel is now committed: to help readers instead of writers, in an attempt to make literature available to the largest possible audience. That commitment is really not so different from the original aim of the New Fiction Society, which was to create a readership interested in contemporary imaginative prose. Unfor-

tunately the Society never seemed able to find it and, failing to get more than 3,500 members, ended up contributing to the statistics that keep pointing out that fewer and fewer people are buying fiction in hard covers. The Quality Paperback Bookclub in the United States, by contrast, (which has managed not only to find the audience for serious contemporary fiction but also to make a lot of money doing so) has succeeded partly by following the trend away from hardback publishing.

The library subscription scheme, on the other hand, has been widely praised for the originality of its conception. A number of magazines provided a free subscription to any British library that requested one, and they were in turn reimbursed by the Council. The scheme seemed to help the production of literary writing on a remarkable number of levels, subsidizing the publisher, the library and the reader all at once.

When the Arts Council announced its intention to phase out the scheme, first by asking libraries to pay half their subscription cost and now by asking them to pay all, the magazines involved were practically disengaged. Philip Spender of *Index on Censorship* tried unsuccessfully to persuade the Council to continue the scheme as a way of administering its grants: "We believed it was a far better way of expressing an Arts Council grant than straight cash. Our grant is then directly related to the magazine's availability." Similarly, *Stand*, whose UK circulation doubled with the scheme, ran a special plea to its subscribers: "For the Arts Council the scheme was a model of thoughtfulness. But *Stand*, however, the loss of income is potentially enormous. We have 1,154 subscriptions at risk. After 27 years of publishing, *Stand* is facing its most

serious single problem." The Arts Council say that the scheme was never intended to be anything more than a way of getting libraries to subscribe to publications it supported. Costing more than £30,000 a year above the annual subsidies already given to the magazines concerned, it did not meet with an encouraging response from libraries. Of its original 1,154 subscriptions, *Stand* now has around 400 to 500. *Agenda* has dropped from 500 to sixty.

The failure of libraries to take up the subscriptions raises questions about audience that the Arts Council has been facing since it began subsidizing literature in the first place. The fact that free library subscriptions of 600 to 1,000 end up constituting nearly half of a magazine's total UK circulation suggests that the publication's appeal is limited. Peter Laidon, the Suffolk County Librarian, made the point clearly when I spoke to him: "Simply making the magazines available didn't really get them to many new readers, and mostly because the magazines themselves were of such a minority interest. The efforts to promote them simply did not help. The magazines were just not capable of reaching a larger audience. I'm not surprised the Arts Council has finally seen the light and ended the scheme."

The Literature Panel of the Arts Council is now in a curious position. Its commitment to entering the economics of publishing, through its subsidies to publishers and its "difficultly even giving away its literary magazines, such a commitment is perhaps more complex than what the simple plan of putting the reader before the writer would suggest.

Among this week's contributors

VALERIE ADAMS is a lecturer in English at University College London.

JOHN BAYLEY is Warton Professor of English at the University of Oxford. His *Shakespeare and Tragedy* was published last year.

BILL BUFORD is co-editor of *Granta*.

J. A. BURROW is the author of *Medieval Writers and their Work* which will be published shortly.

TIMOTHY D'ARCY SMITH is an antiquarian bookseller in London.

J. DAVIS is Reader in Social Anthropology at the University of Kent. He is the author of *People of the Mediterranean*, 1977.

MARTIN DODSWORTH is a lecturer in English at Royal Holloway College, London.

RICHARD EBERHART's most recent collection of poems *Ways of Light* was published in 1980.

GAVIN EWART's *The Collected Ewart 1933-1980* was published last year.

RONALD FAUX is *The Times* correspondent in Scotland.

SIR HAROLD HOESON is an Honorary Fellow of Oriel College, Oxford.

HENRY KAMEN is the author of *The Spanish Inquisition*, 1965, and *The Iron Century: Social Change in Europe 1516-1660*, 1971.

H. G. KOENIGSBERGER's books include *Estates and Revolutions* and *The Habsburgs and Europe 1516-1660*, both 1971.

STEPHEN KOSK's books include *Asquith*, 1978.

RICHMOND LATTIMORE's books include *The Poetry of Greek Tragedy*, 1959. His translation of Homer's *Odyssey* was published in 1968.

NICOLAS WALTER.

134 Northumberland Road, Harrow, Middlesex.

LUCY MICKLETHWAIT is the co-author of *A Dictionary of British Book Illustration*, of which Volume One will be published later this year.

OSWYN MURRAY is a Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford. He is the author of *Early Greece*, 1980.

REDMOND O'HANLON has recently completed a study of Joseph Conrad and Charles Darwin.

VIVIAN SALMON's books include *The Study of Language in 17th-Century England*, 1979.

ROGER SCRUTON is the author of *The Aesthetics of Architecture*, 1979.

T. A. SHUPPEY's books include a study of *Beowulf*, 1979. He is Professor of English Language at the University of Leeds.

R. C. SIMMONS is Reader in American History at the University of Birmingham.

C. H. SISSON's translation of *The Divine Comedy* was published in 1980.

STUART SUTHERLAND is Professor of Experimental Psychology at the University of Sussex.

ANTHONY THWAITE's most recent collection of poems is *Victorian Voices*, 1980.

J. C. TREWEN's books include *Going to Shakespeare*, 1978, and *The Edwardian Theatre*, 1980.

FRANK TUCKER's collection of short stories *Live Ball* was published in 1978.

KEITH WALKER is a lecturer in English at University College London.

J. G. WEIGHTMAN is the author of *The Concept of the Avant-Garde: Explorations in Modernism*, 1973.

Time-travelling

By Lindsay Duguid

DIANA NORMAN:

King of the Last Days
189pp. Hodder and Stoughton.
£5.95.
0 340 27039 X

King of the Last Days, a sequel to *Pilgrimage's Last* is the story of a peasant monk from Clonbury, a well-connected priest from Herefordshire and a crusader knight who take King Arthur's sword Excalibur across France to the dying Henry II. The three travellers dodge armies, foil thieves intent on stealing the relic and learn to fend for themselves in hostile country. With each stage of their journey they achieve new insight and wisdom, and their endeavour — undertaken with "the lunatic singleness of purpose which God gives to saints and martyrs" — yields a picture of the age, a mosaic of religious ideas and superstitions. Incidental characters such as William the Marshall and Gerald of Wales,

and contemporary attitudes — "People still disappeared in the forest never to be found, or they altered shape to become wolves (*loup-garous*), stags and foxes, or became mysteriously pregnant, or older, or younger" — are treated with a kind of ironic gravity, and the less purely historical themes of equality, justice and the futility of suffering give the story seriousness of purpose. Diana Norman's decision to have her characters speak in plain modern English adds greatly to the success of the narrative. She moves easily between informing and entertaining, concealing hindsight and presenting moral dilemmas as they occur. It would be a pity if the lurid and ill-drawn dust jacket provided by the publishers deterred potential readers of this excellent novel.

DEREK WILSON:

Bear Rampant
236pp. Hamish Hamilton. £5.95.
0 241 10147 6

Bear Rampant, the second volume of the "autobiography" of Robert Dud-

ley, covers the years from 1598 to 1603, resuming the account begun in *Bear's Whelp*. The book recounts the swashbuckling adventures of the Earl of Leicester, who, perhaps because this is a first-person narrative, is presented as a paragon of courage, good-sense and chastity. In the period covered by the book, Sir Robert finds favour first with Elizabeth and then with James I. He avoids being embroiled in the intrigues of the Earl of Essex while remaining loyal to his friend and patron. He marries the shy Alice, cements his friendship with Thomas Howard and leads successful expeditions to the West Indies and to Ireland (where he takes Tyrone prisoner) in his ship *The Bear*.

Derek Wilson's prose style mirrors the plain virtuosity of his subject. He is not particularly strong on characterization and is at a loss in emotional scenes, but he has a brisk way with a naval battle and his gusto in piling on dramatic events — mutiny, shipwreck, fights with the natives, horrendous wounds — make up for the lack of sophistication. The prologue to *Bear Rampant* has Robert Dudley looking back on his English adventures from a Florentine pleasure garden, so presumably a further instalment is due.

PHILIPPA WIAT:

The Mistletoe Bough
254pp. Robert Hale. £7.25.
0 7091 8938 9

Philippa Wiat continues her excursions into the realms of ancient legend (the cults of the Long Man of Wilmington in *The Four Poster* and of Volterra in *Lord of the Wolf*), invoking again "the merciless gods of the Old Religion well acquainted with darkness". *The Mistletoe Bough* is set in an Oxfordshire village in the reign of Elizabeth I; it concerns the blacksmith and virtuoso Cecily, the blacksmith's daughter, and her love for the founding Adam who turns out to be the son of the wicked Sir Julian, and a "Chosen One". Against a background of manor houses, yew walks, moats and minstrel galleries (Cecily is taken up by the local gentry) the plot is laboriously worked out. Cecily's fate holds no surprises, given the Prologue and the hints of darkness, magic and evil contained in the first part of the book.

mental separation of British and Cypriot worlds on the small island. Even the countryside is less wild inside the Sovereign Base Area than in the surrounding Cypriot territory, although the occasional savaging of a domestic pet reminds the SBA inhabitants of the existence of primitive forces outside the boundary.

Cyprus song

By M. G. McCulloch

GORDON HONEYCOMBE:

The Edge of Heaven
416pp. Hutchinson. £7.95.
0 91340 30 5

In his fifth novel, *The Edge of Heaven*, Gordon Honeycombe rescues a rather hackneyed story from banality less through stylistic skill than through the concerns which colour the telling of the tale.

The story is of infatuation indulged, with fatal consequences, but the double tragedy at the end of the affair, one life lost and another wasted, is the result not of illicit passion but of the insularity which renders the British woman both unwilling and unable to understand the Greek Cypriot refugee boy with whom she has become involved, and the modern Greek Cypriot society of which he is a part. The divisions which separate the two societies are well observed, but even more striking is the sense of the physical and

A Wordsworthian self-apostrophe from the fourth floor of the Hotel Admiral (Copenhagen)

Relax. Relax. It's 8 o'clock. The gulls patrol the harbour. It's a perfect Danish winter morning. A man is fooling about with a snow-machine, a brush that whirs a pathway on the quay. A little snow-blizzard looks to be blowing, but you're inside and warm; with loved ones far away, Margo, Jane, Julian, the family names - Victorian sentimentality, but still are loved ones and absence makes the heart grow fonder, though some say out of sight is out of mind. Wordsworthian thoughts! And soppy Richard Jefferies prosed of the fine physiques of "dearest Greece" (*The Story Of My Heart*, your journey book).

Relax. Relax. The gulls float by the window. So much of life is so repetitive. Breakfast comes up, five kinds of bread and coffee. The roll is hundreds-and-thousands in caraway seeds - I love the little buggers - remember what Churchill said when Admirals plonked Traditions of the Service. The joy of caraway seeds and coffee! And you reflect that this is a blue city and Wordsworth wouldn't have liked it. Apparently, the sex-shows need a hush, cathedral silence, solemn and complete - the man cannot maintain his proud erection in face of ribald cries, or shouts, or laughter.

Relax. Relax. Baby, it's cold outside! Life below freezing. The Danish word for scissors? Your nails need cutting. Such minutiae aren't part of the egotistical sublime, but they're important to the traveller. Long poems spread the inspiration thin like Danish butter on the varied bread.

And in the night a sucking great ship ties up (to use the language of sailors) - the *Prinsesse Margrethe* - perhaps about fifty yards from the hotel window. It looks huge and reminds you of Newhaven.

"Hills that purify those who walk on them" I read in Jefferies. You might as well write: "Ships that purify those who sail in them". The snow keeps up. You mean, keeps drifting down. All prepositions are a wayward race.

Hot news comes in - a Right Wing coup in Spain. Young Wordsworth wouldn't have liked it, the old one wouldn't have cared. It makes you feel quite sick. You're back once more in 1936, and twenty years old, Spain, a Republic. You can't do much about it (you couldn't then). Franco didn't end upside down, like Mussolini.

Abortive - comes the news. Long, sighed relief!

Freedom a topsy bar where tits are swinging - the bad regimes are bras to crowd them in.

Your Copenhagen Guide says "Topples Girls", with Spanking, Animal, Rubber, Urine, Chains.

Jefferies gets better - on the Victorian vice of work and how many millions slave to keep alive - a kind of blue sky socialism. He didn't believe in God but neither did he credit Evolution. In ways, a Lawrence before his time - in 1883 the legs were limbs.

Oh, such limp verse could limp right on for ever - as Wordsworth might, garden roses up and down composing, to spout it all out to Dorothy, a kettle on the boil and the receptive, humble as the tea-pot, ready to write it down.

Relax. Yours is a similar domestic brew. Drift lazy like the gulls. Sex, love and politics, won't stop for you, an engine idling. Those gulls bring a message too; relax, relax.

23rd February-2nd March
revised 28th April, 1981

Gavin Ewart

Vatic vernacular

By Valerie Adams

ANTHONY S. G. EDWARDS (Editor):
Skelton
The Critical Heritage
224pp. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
£10.50.
0 7100 0724 8

"The writers of literary histories", complained Richard Hughes in 1929, "have been content to repeat with parrot-like persistence, one after the other, that Skelton was a witty but coarse satirist, having occasionally a certain rude charm, but in the main bungling...". This comment may serve as a not unfair summary of the opinions collected in this book, in spite of the frequency with which critics take earlier critics to task for being improperly equipped to appreciate Skelton.

Before Thomas Warton there is little of critical interest, and there is almost no critical approval until Southey's praise of Skelton's "perfect originality". A few Victorian writers, beginning with Isaac D'Israeli in 1840, are enthusiastic at some length, and in the 1920s and 1930s a group of poets including Robert Graves and Edmund Blunden announced the rediscovery of a poet previously thought too difficult. The final piece is from C. S. Lewis's *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*.

In his introduction, Anthony Edwards comments at length, and relevantly, on the growth of the Skelton "legend". Many of the critics in the book have not attended scrupulously to the distinction between fact and myth, speculation about the life having proved easier than evaluation of the works. The debonair practical joker of the *Merry Tales*, the learned courtier of Erasmus's compliments, the fearless attacker of Wolsey on the people's behalf, and the creator (or acquaintance) of Eleanor Rummung, combine to make an attractive persona and one whose credibility can be underlined by judicious quotation from the poems. The buffoon depicted by Ben Jonson in *The Fortunate Isles* becomes the implicit derisive appreciation by the 1844 reviewer of Dyer's edition ("We only hope that he was not the father confessor of the fair Joanna Scroope"), the student of "the vernacular" imagined by a writer of 1866 as doing field-work in streets and markets, and the *vates* celebrated by Robert Graves.

Edwards sees criticism, for the purposes of this anthology, as an activity entirely separate from scholarship. "Speke Parrot" is no longer, in Lewis's words, "nonsense to us because it is a cryptogram of which we have lost the key", but the studies of William Nelson and H. L. R. Edwards are not represented here. The slightness of most of the comment that is included, and the general lack of interest in Skelton in the past - none of the great literary critics have thought him worth more than a passing mention - hardly support Edwards's view that Skelton's purpose and to his actual achievement in 1521.

Poetical Puritan

By R. C. Simmons

PETER WHITE:
Benjamin Tompson, Colonial Bard
A Critical Edition
218pp. Pennsylvania State University Press, £10.
0 271 00250 6

To describe Benjamin Tompson (1642-1714) as a "colonial bard, the singer of the American past" is not very helpful. His verses are unlyrical and his sense of New England's past no different from that held by most of his contemporaries, second-generation American Puritans. Bards are also traditionally seen as purveyors of poetry in quantity while Tompson's slender output occupies the little more than a quarter of the pages of this critical edition; introduction, notes, and other apparatus account for the rest.

Unlike the two best poets of Puritan New England, Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor, Tompson lacked an intense personal vision. He seems to have considered the ability to compose verse as a helpful recommendation for an educated but only marginally successful minister's son. His writings are largely topical, and occasional.

Tompson's best-known pieces con-

"The libels of one age", says the 1844 reviewer defensively, "become valuable historical evidence to posterity." Not surprisingly, the nineteenth-century writers value the satires for the facts to be gleaned from them, and for their language, "the very vulgar tongue of the times". Pope's criticism of "Billingsgate language" is repeated in 1844 with approval: "good set Billingsgate". These critics admire "Skelton's" verse as - again in the words of the 1844 reviewer - "inimitable doggerel". "Doggerel!" exclaims Humbert Wolfe in 1929, praising Skelton's mastery of prosody, as do the other poets. Auden, whose essay of 1935 is one of the few pieces of value here, has some perceptive paragraphs on stress-timed rhythm, but only C. S. Lewis seriously poses the question of how "Skeltonics" please.

The Victorian critics studied Dyer's scholarly apparatus with care. They shared his assumption that Skelton could expect few readers, and they provide a variety of illustrative quotations. Several of the twentieth-century writers express scorn for the "antiquarianism". Blunden and Graves see Dyer's edition as unsuitable for the layman; in consequence their essays, too, read like advertisements for Skelton. (Quotations from the poems are generally not given in the book: line numbers from Dyer are substituted, and this makes for considerable inconvenience in reading.) "Speke Parrot", almost unnoticed in the nineteenth century and before, is now singled out for admiration. Its obscurity is acknowledged, but brushed aside: "as all great poets must," says Hughes, "it baffles eulogy". Again, only Lewis, in this book, is prepared to admit the problem: "Our pleasure in it may be almost wholly foreign to Skelton's purpose and to his actual achievement in 1521."

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The interests of the patient

By Galen Strawson

STEPHEN TROMBLEY:

'All that Summer She was Mad'
Virginia Woolf and Her Doctors
348pp. Junction Books, £9.95.
0 86245 039 X

"The mind having once acquired a bias is very ready to accept as evidence all that agrees with this, and to reject what may be in opposition to the favourite idea." Thus Sir George Savage, one of Virginia Woolf's doctors, writing in 1891. The Woolfs' dislike of being confined to nursing homes were itself clear evidence that it was the wrong treatment, and as if Leonard and the others were demonstrably not trying to act in her best interest, just because they knew she disliked it.

It is true that, with the exception of Sir Henry Head, with the writings of the doctors, and those of Sir Maurice Craig and T. B. Hyslop in particular, make sobering and sometimes sinister reading. But although they are of interest in their own right, they contribute almost nothing to the understanding of Virginia Woolf's periods of madness. Obviously, it was the doctors' practical recommendations about treatment that mattered most to her, and these, whatever their theoretical underpinnings, were pretty straightforward. Their theories are, however, relevant in a second way, a way which Trombley touches on, but does not adequately develop: Virginia doubtless knew something of the general drift of a novel and eccentric position which, while being finally unacceptable - for one single strand of the truth is presented as if it were the whole truth - none the less serves to increase our understanding of the whole, by shifting the distribution of the existing things as her feelings of guilt about interpretative stresses. It is a most insensitive work. It is not so much a question of intellectual failure - though the level of scholarship is low by any ordinary standard - as of a failure of sensibility.

What then is Trombley's theory? There is in fact nothing really worthy of the name in his book. Rather, there is a general attitude of hostility towards Leonard Woolf, and, to a lesser extent, towards Virginia Woolf's biographer Quentin Bell. It is suggested, or implied, more or less directly, that Leonard Woolf was (at least) insensitive to his wife, and insensitive in her regard; that they were not happy together; and that she was never happy together; and that Quentin Bell and almost all those who knew the couple were wrong about this. We are told that the "image of Virginia as a bedridden lunatic is one that ought to be dispelled"; though we are not told either who promulgates or who possesses such an image - doubtless all will agree with the claim, though few of those who have read much about Virginia Woolf will recognize the miserable victim of incomprehension that Trombley presents us with. Finally, the use of the word "mad" in connection with Virginia Woolf is objected to, saying that Virginia Woolf was - ever - mad; although in fact he does so more than once himself.

Here then are some fairly palpable claims. The subtitle of the book, *Virginia Woolf and Her Doctors*, holds promise of some more substantial theory. But the discussions of the work of Sir George Savage, Sir Henry Head, Sir Maurice Craig and T. B. Hyslop have really very little to do with Virginia Woolf. If they have any bearing on her case, and on the rights and wrongs of how she was treated when unwell, it is principally in two ways, of which the first is this: they show that Vanessa and Clive Bell and Leonard Woolf acted in accord with the views of the most respected doctors of the day - regarding treatment, at least - in sending Virginia to nursing homes and prescribing enforced rest; lots of food, absence of intellectual stimulation, and so on, when she was unwell.

Trombley claims Virginia "had every reason to feel... that she was the victim of a conspiracy" at such

times. This is of course false if it is taken in the most natural way to mean that she was in fact the victim of a (malevolent) conspiracy against her; what is true is merely that it is not surprising that this is how the behaviour of those close to her sometimes appeared to her when (and given that) she was unwell - as doctors were consulted, discussions were held, and it was agreed that she should go to the nursing home. Trombley sometimes writes as if Virginia's dislike of being confined to nursing homes were itself clear evidence that it was the wrong treatment, and as if Leonard and the others were demonstrably not trying to act in her best interest, just because they knew she disliked it.

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Case Study

At the fact of our own murder
Everything in our mind goes white.

We lean over the corpses with our names
Fumbling at their scroves, their turned-out pockets,
That scrap of paper with the telephone numbers
And we can never say anything.

And when later we withdraw
To another room, for coffee, perhaps, or to hold
One jumpy cigarette in the air for company,
We can't stop talking, we talk wildly.

But we know really
We are silent and alone
Staring back into our own dead eyes
Feeling the weight of our own dead hands
Over our mouths
Like stone.

My friend, I say
My friend, you say
Such a simple word... how many years ago
We burnt it to an illegible coin
And threw it away.

Andrew Harvey

indeed, given the evidence, though irresponsible; so also is Trombley's uncritical endorsement of it.

So much for the doctors. What about Trombley's views on madness? One of his problems with the word "madness" is that he tends to treat it as an all-or-nothing matter: he appears to think that one must either attribute Virginia's breakdowns to "some inherent madness", conceived as a permanent condition, or deny that she was ever mad at all. The same sort of reasoning appears to be this: if things ever went badly between them, if there were any respects in which their marriage was not a success (sexually, for example) then it was not and never a success at all. Given his tendency to regiment everything in such simple terms (his doing so is no doubt partly explained by his polemical aims), Trombley is very ill suited to discussing the life of a woman who underwent enormous changes; who suffered periods of complete breakdown, and yet was, at other times, in her own words "a great amateur of the art of life", and a very successful one, capable of great kindness and serene assurance, of infectious good humour and liveliness; and who at the same time could feel deeply insecure, and speak very maliciously of others, and be again in her own words "oddly vehement, and very exacting, and so difficult to live with and so very intemperate and changeable".

If Trombley denies that Virginia Woolf was mad, what does he grant? That she was "at various periods in her life, distressed to such an extent that she could not work, could not concentrate" - indeed, on occasion she lost the will to live. The objection is only to the notion of "inherent madness". But this is very vague; and it is not clear to whom the objection is correctly made. It is true that Bell, discussing Virginia's instability, develops the image of "a cancer of the mind... always working away somewhere, always in suspense", but here he is intent on dramatizing her fear of going mad again, comparing it explicitly with the fear of one who has had a physical cancer, and knows that it may return - who knows the *predilection* is there. He is characterizing the terror of losing control - "I feel certain I am going mad again... I can't fight any longer", she wrote in 1941; to say that someone has to live with this terror is not to speak of "inherent madness", or if it is, then to speak of inherent madness is correct, in Virginia Woolf's case.

At the outset of the book, Trombley states that "in this work, Virginia's breakdowns will be considered in the context of the pressures which bore upon her at the time - entirely proper, but hardly original. In his conclusion, he speaks of the battle lines having been drawn; he, presumably, is on one side, "Leonard and Professor Bell" are on the other. But in the end his fuss about the word "mad" leads him to no reasoned or plausible conclusion with which they would disagree. And confidence in Trombley's views about when judgements of madness or of mental disorder are appropriate - together with confidence in his scholarship - must be considerably shaken by the following way in which he accommodates facts - in this case "facts" - to pre-petified theory.

Virginia's brother Thoby died on November 20, 1906. Trombley has this to say:

The extent of the immediate shock of Thoby's death is touchingly revealed in three letters to Violet Dickinson, written between 237 and 307 November. In them, Virginia adheres to a fantasy in which Thoby is still alive. It would be wrong to interpret these fantasies as evidence of an unhinged mind. What they do represent is

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The hero who never was

By J. C. Trewin

PAUL FERRIS:
Richard Burton
212pp. Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
£7.95.
0 297 77966 4

It is hard to talk about British stage history without remembering its might-have-beens: players, apparently established, who disappeared like a snow-drift in thaw. Thence, however, the wars, John Swinley, a romantic and classical actor, had almost every major gift, with a safer memory he could have led the profession. Later, Wilfrid Lawson, dynamic but unstable, generated a power that suddenly faded. An older man than either of these, Randle Ayrton, rugged crag of a Shakespearean, never coveted London fame, though he was arguably the best Lear of his period and influenced Waft, who played Kent to him at Stratford. And what will future generations say of Ernest Milton, on his night the subtlest actor of them all, who ended as a mannered eccentric?

Most recently we may think of Richard Burton. He seemed to many critics - not to all, for some protested at hyperbole - to be in his youth a stage actor of heroic calibre. Today, as one of several show-stoppers of the cinema, he remains (however precarious the conjecture) a might-have-been. He is fifty-six. There may yet be time for him to rise from a chaos of news-stories and to confirm a quality that to some is blindingly self-evident, to others elusive. A Lear is rumoured, but then it has been rumoured for a long time

now. On his second page of candid biography, Paul Ferris notes that once or twice a commemorative plaque fixed to Burton's South Wales birthplace at Pontrhydyfen, in the mining valley of the river Afan, has disappeared during the night. That can sound strangely like a comment on Burton's life.

Ferris had to write against odds. Burton himself has been silent except for vague promises to "be in touch". Here Ferris says simply: "After a few more letters I stopped trying and got on with the book." In getting on with it, though many people whom he lists helped him, he got no help at all from others, important from his point of view, who declined silence. He lists them as well. Clearly the book has been a struggle to reach the heart of a mystery, an effort that has left an expert researcher undismayed. His work, continuously absorbing, does create the figure of Richard Burton for us. A biography of someone still alive is liable to lose focus as it approaches the present. All lives are conditional until they are over, and it is dangerous to draw conclusions from what happened yesterday.

True; yet Burton's yesterdays have closed in on him. If he has "never been able to shake off the theatre and its mixture of threat and promise", he did say in 1975: "Acting is somehow shameful for a man to do." (A curious echo there of William, Charles, Macready.) Compact of contradictions, Burton was also heard to declare this while "full of drink" and on a film location - "The only thing in life is language, not love, nor anything else".

He was born Richard Jenkins, a

miner's son. His mother died when he was a year old, and his eldest sister brought him up in Port Talbot. His school days are blurred, but he left to be for eighteen months a haberdasher's assistant at the local Co-op and, remarkably, returned to school within a few weeks of his seventeenth birthday. With his hold features, wide-set blue-green eyes, flexible voice, and sharp intelligence, he would learn much from the teaching of Philip Burton, a master who he called "a deep urge to fulfil myself as an actor or a writer through another person". In December 1943 he became Richard's surrogate father and the boy took his name.

There followed a first theatre part, a small one, in Emyln Williams' comedy, *The Druid's Rest*, which ran briefly in London during the spring of 1944 - and then six months in a mixed academic and service course at Oxford while training for the RAF. Burton played Shakespeare's Angelo with Oxford amateurs, a fine portrait that would linger in the mind of Nevil Coghill, who directed. After the war and after the RAF, Burton began a full professional career in which his secret plot upon which transgressors will be prosecuted, a rooted solitude which his Welsh blood tinged with mystery. Inside these limits, he is a master. Beyond them, he has much to learn.

Presently, in 1951, he was taken on at Stratford-upon-Avon, the target of the day's young actors. As Prince Hal and Henry V, Burton, proud, independent, imaginative, oddly lonely, was over-valued by some critics ("a shrewd Welsh boy shines out with greatness" - Kenneth Tynan), and treated cautiously by others. These, while agreeing with Anthony Quayle's phrase, quoted here, "The face was . . . a magnifi-

cent mask", could find as yet too little behind it. Still, Stratford fortified Burton's reputation as "the crown prince . . . the actor who would take the mantle of both Gielgud and Olivier". He plunged into films. In time, during the season of 1953-54, he reached the Old Vic (after an Edinburgh Festival) as a Hamlet described as "good, with reservations": it was a concentrated performance, though it did not give much idea of what was happening in Hamlet's mind.

At the Old Vic he had various other parts: the Bastard, Coriolanus, Caliban; and he was back at the theatre, after some undistinguished Hollywood films, in the winter of 1955. His Henry V, "equally at home in love and war", triumphed, and there were doubts about the Othello and Iago he alternated with John Neville in the following spring: a few critics found him superficial (less so as Iago). His aspect was usually superb, with what Emyln Williams once called "the face of a boxing poet". It would help him in the clutter of films that ensued. On the stage, as Tynan - otherwise not invariably to be trusted - put it: "Within this actor there is always something reserved, a secret plot upon which transgressors will be prosecuted, a rooted solitude which his Welsh blood tinged with mystery. Inside these limits, he is a master. Beyond them, he has much to learn."

We cannot say how much, if anything, he learnt in the theatre, because those Old Vic performances were his last in the English theatre apart from a disastrous Dr Faustus a decade later at Oxford. Burton (and his wife Elizabeth Taylor, the Helen) acted in the OUDS production for the sake of Professor Coghill, who had helped him in youth: a generous

gesture, but his speaking glumly lacked poetic quality.

Now and again in a film - and some were most unfortunate - Burton had been extraordinary, especially in the flare of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* Though he was not pleased with himself, the film did, and does, live. He acted too, in a *Hamlet* done curiously "in rehearsal clothes" and directed by John Gielgud. The production, *Varley* exclaimed, secured "the highest possible of the Shakespeare classic in US, if not world stage, annals".

It grew more and more difficult now to separate Burton the artist from his publicized matrimonial complexities - including two marriages with, and two separations from, Elizabeth Taylor - and a multiplicity of apocryphal stories for many of which he was responsible. He had what is known as a drink problem. He talked again and again of a possible Lear. He commanded vast salaries. He acted in the New York *Equus* and toured with the musical *Camelot*. Among the chaos of his artistic life, honestly and sympathetically described by Paul Ferris, he was never the "crown prince" once so anxiously hailed, rather an imperious odd man out, living on his past and looking towards an undefined future.

One gets an inescapable impression of a lost and lonely man, no longer the "cavalry leader" admired by a former associate. It is unlikely that he reads Barrie's *Dear Brutus*. If he does, he may recall the end of the second act shadows gather and the child cries "out of the impalpable that is carrying her away". "I don't want to be a night-haunted man." A similar thought must sometimes have occurred to Richard Burton.

SPORTS AND PASTIMES

The statistics of a game

By Timothy D'Arch Smith

BILL FRINDALL:
The Wisden Book of Cricket Records
618pp. Queen Anne Press. £14.
0 362 005 46 X

This book descends directly from the work of another radio cricket statistician, Roy Webber, who produced in 1951 and revised ten years later *The Wisden Book of Cricket Records*. Bill Frindall, who, in 1966, succeeded Arthur Wrigley as BBC Radio's scorer, produced two years later *The Key Book of Cricket Records* based on Webber's researches. Faulty though it was, demanding a sixty-two-page supplement (1970), it did not deserve the fate it received. It was systematically torn to pieces in the columns of an anarchical although authoritative cricketing journal, edited and published by the late Rowland Bowen.

Bowen used regularly to predict the decay, even the death of cricket. "Yet it may be in the end all for the good", he wrote in his quirky history of the game, "it is good that nations grow up. It is good that they cease from childish things."

Mr Frindall did not allow himself to be deterred, however, and has worked on, elaborating the methods of scoring (his system should be devised for all first-class matches) and revising and updating his statistical work. In the past cricket statisticians have been hampered by the inability to decide which matches were or were not first-class (Frindall deals only with first-class cricket). A ruling was made at the International Cricket Conference on May 19, 1947, but it was not retrospective. It is good to go to *Wisden* for advice for, despite its authority and some would say its autocracy (especially the matter of the status of the 1970 Test of the World Series), it is not infallible. Frindall points out in his preface that since the publication of *A Guide to First-Class Cricket Matches Played in the British Isles* (and presumably, although he does not say so, its Australian counterpart) by the Association of Cricket Statisticians - a small band of guerrillas now settled to a crack front-line regiment - his problems have been solved. At last there is a bedrock of authority on which to base the sort of book he has compiled.

Shortly before the Lord's Test against Pakistan in 1974, when Asif Masood delighted with a backward two-step class before striking his bowling run but which was otherwise uneventful, I heard an MCC member ask where the Warner Stand was. Two things worried me then about the seemingly innocent enquiry and worry me no less today. First, as a cricket enthusiast he should have known that the Warner Stand is just about the worst vantage-point from which to watch the cricket and second, and far more important, he should have known the way around his own ground. A conciliatory friend pointed out to me that many MCC members - only attend Test Matches and otherwise follow the game in newspapers or the kind of book under review.

Frindall's statistics demonstrate however, that the ancient cricket test has today not in the least lost its ebb and flow of the county championship. In the past twenty years, the following records have been broken: the highest fourth innings total without loss; most runs in a day by both teams; the greatest number of bowlers used in a match; six batsmen similarly dismissed in succession in an innings; the fastest fifty; the second fastest hundred; the fastest century; the most runs in a day; the highest second-wicket partnership; the most catches by one fielder in an innings. None of these events occurred in Test cricket, whose immense proliferation in recent years, not explained only by Pakistan's elevation to Test status in 1952, can best be seen from the fact that whereas it

took Keith Miller seven years to do the "double" (1000 runs and 100 wickets) in Test cricket, it took Kapil Dev, with respect to a far inferior player, only twenty-seven months. If our MCC member had really been following the game he would have noted that in the thirty-two instances of the fewest runs in a full day's play, twenty-seven occurred in Test matches and all of those twenty-seven since 1953. The most maiden overs in succession were bowled in a post-war Test, as was the scoring of the slowest 50 and the slowest century.

And yet nobody goes to county matches. The slumbers of cricket administrators, though they can never be golden, would be considerably easier if only spectators, all admirably hungry for the game, could be weaned off Test cricket and one-day (and therefore not first-class) matches, and the MCC member who inquired of the Warner Stand and his kind be persuaded that they are not members of an elite assembly (as anyone who has spent a day in the Lord's pavilion will know) but are in

fact missing most of the excitement of the game they profess to enjoy. It is too much to hope that Frindall's book will do this but its pages clearly demonstrate the truth.

Enough of carping. This is a delightful book in which to browse. It is like taking a walk in a strange, exotic garden. There is always sunshine here. We stray down paths and along alleys far removed often from the walk we intended to take, endlessly admiring and in amazement. But, warned. If it is a garden of delights it is also a garden of illusions. Statistics can so often prove all or nothing. Apart from the baleful entry in the score-book, "Oldfield retired hurt 41," we can prove statistically that at the worst bodyline did not exist, at best that it failed in its purpose. C. C. Inman's 50 in eight minutes (Leicestershire v Nottinghamshire, 1965) sounds splendid until we learn it was scored off full tosses howled to expedite a declaration and in any case the length of an innings has no bearing at all on its merit. The only criterion is the number of balls the

batsman receives (hence the reason counties should adopt Frindall's scoring methods).

Despite individual performances cricket remains a team game, with victory the ultimate goal, and we cannot tell from mere statistics whether good batting or bowling won the match. Subba Row's 300 at the Oval in 1958 (his stand with Lightfoot for the sixth wicket is a county record) did not win the match for Northamptonshire, nor did Santall's 201 not out v Northamptonshire in 1933 win it for Warwickshire. Flavell's 9-122 for Worcestershire in 1954 did not bow his side to victory against Sussex. Match-deciding records are surely the only ones that matter. Some work has been done on these. Sutcliffe's match-winning innings were prodigious apparently, surpassing those of Bradman, or even Trumper.

There are here one or two meaningless records. To have made 1,000 runs in India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka is by no stretch of the im-

agination a record since they are three different countries (Frindall does not lump together any other countries). Surely Bradman should not be credited with the highest score made by a no 7 batsman in Test cricket (230 v England at Melbourne, 1936-37) since he sent in his lower order before him while the pitch and health recovered. Certainly it is the highest score for a batsman suffering from influenza but probably Ames's 137 v New Zealand at Lord's in 1931 is the more accurate record.

Strange lost ghosts stalk our garden. Spare a thought for C. I. B. Wood (Leicestershire) who carried his bat through a completed innings seventeen times (equal highest with Grace) but who never played for England. Where is Li R. P. Hammond-Chambers Borgnis (*Wisden* doesn't give him nearly so many names) who made 101 on his first class debut, for Combined Services v New Zealand at Portsmouth in 1937. Killed in action? In retirement in Devonshire? Like Hamlet's father they cry to us. "Remember me."

Poison, petrification and posterity

By Redmond O'Hanlon

JOHN C. METCALF:
Taxidermy
A complete manual
166pp. Duckworth.
0 7156 1565 3

Once engaged in taxidermy, even if you are lucky enough to escape the malignant pustule of the cutaneous form of anthrax, the Blubber Finger of crypsidias, the diarrhoea of salmonellosis, the usually fatal encephalitis of B virus; the merely forty per cent fatal vervet monkey disease (Marburg agent); or the much less exciting malaise of tuberculosis; the uneasiness, depression, paralysis and convulsion of rabies; or even the tediously familiar old bubo in the armpit of the plague, it would be hubris to expect to emerge unscathed from the inhalation of dangerous solvents, or from the accumulation of arsenic under the finger nails or, when using synthetic resins, from the spontaneous combustion of wastes.

However, supposing you do survive, your squirrel may still look like six lengths of mutant stoat, your finished jack resemble one small, bright ground-to-air missile.

As a boy, surrounded by dissecting kit, alum and packets of porridge oats to soak up the blood, sitting at the kitchen table and all night furiously skinning a badger which eventually became so like a Giant Panda that he was banished to an outhouse, I would have given several boxes of rabbit-kins to possess John C. Metcalf's manual.

A very brief history of taxidermy, from prehistoric man's preservation of skins for his clothing, through the dismembering and embalming of Egyptian corpses, to the beginnings of modern techniques some 350 years ago (the oldest known specimen of the art proper, apparently, is the rhinoceros in the Royal Museum of Vertebrates in Florence, but the "method of preparation is as yet undetermined") is followed by advice on how to avoid playing host to various ill-mannered and some simply murderous micro-organisms, and on basic and advanced tools and materials (potassium permanganate "dissolves in water to a purple solution which the taxidermist can use to stain faded antlers"). General tips from the hard-won experience of this Taxidermist to the Wildlife Trust and to the Forestry Commission (be careful when skinning the heads of birds, and particularly of owls, "not to puncture the eyes; otherwise spillage of their contents will badly soil the feathers of the face") give way to clear and systematic instructions on skinning, preserving, moulding and casting, essential measurements and how to record them, and on the collection of ectoparasites from the specimen.

Birds are then diagrammatically skinned before your eyes, the body mass and tongue removed, the green-gland excised from the upper tail-stump, the cleaned skull pushed back into the head-skin, cottonwool placed in the eye-sockets, the wing and leg-bones wound with tow and the wing-bones linked together, an artificial body inserted and the whole mounted with a complicated skewering and intertwining of wires. Very small mammals are freeze-dried, small mammals are skinned through the mouth, medium-sized mammals are skinned on a specially designed fleshing-board and a horse is lovingly uncoated, suspended from a scaffold, contact-cast in fibre-glass and the hollow replica reconstituted ("the skin of the muzzle is now pulled down and modelled in place").

There are lucid chapters on the very difficult arts of skinning, mounting and casting fish - pike and bass

are the best to attempt first as their scales are least easily dislodged (but pike are armed with "a large number of very sharp teeth, so that the task of removing flesh from the jaws is hazardous"). Take a photographic transparency of the wet fish before its delicate colours fade and then project it on to the finished specimen, restoring its beauty with oil-paints and with cre-o-pearl essence ("first discovered by a French rosary maker named Jacquin in the seventeenth century. He used to coat beads to resemble natural pearls. . ."), a "fish silver" made from the scales of bleak, herring, sardine and bristling with which you must touch the edges of each scale of your trophy ("This, needless to say, is a most laborious task.")

In contrast, crustaceans, which need only to be evicted from their own casts, are a great relief. And so is the freeze-drying of small verte-

brates, fungi and flowers, so easy, indeed, that to the "professional preparator" the method "may appear, to say the least, to be cheating". However, he may then restore his self-respect by subjecting himself to the fiendishly intricate and foul-smelling *rite de passage* of the preparation and articulation of skeletons ("the specimen to be macerated is submerged in warm water and a cube of rotting flesh added. The progress of maceration must be checked daily").

Notes on preparing habitats are followed by rightly stern instructions on taxidermists and the law: a checklist of eye sizes and colours for birds and mammals, the names and addresses of suppliers. A reasonable index and an adequate bibliography complete a work which will technically supersede and artistically augment even such classics as Browne, Montagu, *Practical Taxidermy*, London, 1884.

The challenge of Chomolungma

By Ronald Faux

WALT UNSWORTH:
Everest
578pp. Allen Lane. £14.95.
0 7139 1108 5
JOE TASKER:
Everest the Cruel Way
166pp. Eyre Methuen. £6.95.
0 413 48750 4

Everest may not be the most attractive or even the hardest mountain on earth to climb but being the highest it has acquired the richest history. Most nations with a developed sense of mountain conquest have sought to raise their flags on its summit and the attraction of Chomolungma, the Goddess Mother of the World, as the locals call this imperious peak, continues undiminished.

It is a particularly British mountain and fortunately Sir George Everest, the Surveyor General for India, had a suitably ringing name to bestow upon it. As Walt Unsworth ponders in his formidable *Everest*, one wonders how the story might have developed had he been called Sir Cuthbert Shuttlebottom. (Though that is but a slight aside in what ranks as the most thorough and lucid account of Everest's history.) The mountain has been fairly shrouded with heroic and tragic endeavour, bizarre adventure and acrimonious in-fighting. By a careful sifting of the records Unsworth has filled in some of the gaps. He is, however, wary of the "Everest" story, he has sometimes been obliged to resort to intelligent guesswork.

He doubts whether Mallory and Irvine reached the summit and sug-

gests that they either perished on the final ridge in an ill-fated storm or else tobogganed to their deaths after falling back on to the long cylinders of oxygen they were thought to have been carrying. He also speculates on Mallory's motives for choosing Irvine as a summit partner when the redoubtable Odell was there, far stronger and more experienced. Could it be that Mallory was homosexually attracted towards the younger man? There had to be some reason for his choice. Certainly Mallory emerges as less of a hero from this account.

Letters between the 1921 expedition and headquarters reveal that he was absent-minded to a fault. General Bruce, leader in 1922, remarked of Mallory: "He's a great dear, but forget his boots on all occasions." Bruce was certainly no Blimp and according to this fresh light on the early Everesters, he delighted in telling bawdy stories and in wrestling with his Gurkhas on the parade ground. He trained for the expedition by running up a local hill each morning carrying a man on his back.

The early expeditions ended with the Himalayan Committee, and eventually the Government, locked in a diplomatic row with the Tibetan authorities. It now emerges that these flames were fanned by the local British political officer in Sikim who took exception to having mountaineering expeditions invading his territory. This trouble and the war brought to Britain by the extraordinary photographer John Noel did more to prevent further exploration of Everest than did the shock at the deaths of Mallory and Irvine.

It was not until the 1930s that British mountaineers again began to bag their boots against Everest and Eric Shipton emerged as one of the

greatest mountain explorers. Three times he tried to scale the mountain from Tibet and in 1951 led the reconnaissance that discovered the key to the western approach through Nepal.

Why, then, was he not chosen as leader for the 1953 expedition? Unsworth answers this old puzzle by pointing to Shipton's shy dislike of big expeditions devoted to conquest. After such a lengthy record of failure, an under intense pressure to succeed, the Himalayan Committee became convinced that a military-style assault was the surest answer. Shipton was clearly not the man to lead such an attempt and John Hunt, an army officer with the reputation of being "a terrific thruster", replaced him as leader.

Success was only the end of the beginning of the Everest story. There have been some twenty-eight ascents since and the mountain remains "there", although it seems that Mallory may not have intended his famous remark to be flippant. Unsworth points out that Mallory had often used "there" to indicate any thing with a mystical quality that he could not put into words - which certainly applied to climbing Everest.

Fine and thorough piece of research though it is, Walt Unsworth's book is not the last word to be written about Everest. Joe Tasker in *Everest the Cruel Way* describes last year's attempt to climb the highest peak by its most infamous route without the aid of oxygen equipment and in the windy depths of winter. The team failed to reach the top but the experience convinced the climbers that this winter season has opened a new era in mountaineering that augurs well for the future crop of high-level adventure.

The staging of the play

By John Russell Brown

RALPH BERRY:
Changing Styles in Shakespeare
123pp. George Allen and Unwin.
£8.50.
0 04 822042 6

The title *Changing Styles in Shakespeare* betrays the nature of Ralph Berry's book. More precisely, it is an account of the staging of six plays by Shakespeare, with a special focus on British productions in the years after the Second World War. Following a short general introduction, each play is given a separate chapter in which the question of how "the search for meanings in Shakespeare" has been conducted in the theatre is discussed. The larger questions of style - how the plays have been staged, rehearsed, presented, acted and received - are not pursued.

The most original features of the book are its pitch and scope. On the staging of individual plays far more illuminating accounts are available: Marvin Rosenberg's thorough but cumbersome books on *Othello*, *Lear* and *Macbeth*, John Ripley's stage-history of *Julius Caesar* or, most recently, Julie Hankley's edition of *Richard III* (reviewed in the TLS on July 10) which reveals the play in performance through an extensive historical introduction and double-columned annotations packed tight with details of individual performances and productions. More sustained critiques of post-war Shakespearean production have also been published, especially Richard David's *Shakespeare in the Theatre* and Stanley Wells's *Royal Shakespeare*.

Professor Berry moves more lightly and speedily than any of these scholars. He passes from one play to another with little cross-reference between the six of them. His evidence is varied and his selection a little haphazard: he discusses "directors", pronunciation, production notes, the playing-text, the known characteristics of the leading actors, the reviews, as occasion served, taking evidence where I can get it. He seems to be collecting oddities

of Shakespearean production, as a pigeon picks up crumbs. It seems not to have crossed his mind that the notions about a play that are published before a first night in interview or programme might not reveal the heart of a director's understanding. He underestimates the effect of casting; for example, he comments that "with *Troilus* and *Cressida* there is really little to say, for the little roles have merely to be filled by attractive young people, that is all". He also has little to say about methods of rehearsal.

Berry has suited his style to his theme as he understands it, and especially to his desire to "concentrate on the ideas of each production". He needs to be reminded of a little uncertainty because he wants to show how the texts are "infinitely susceptible to reinterpretation". He has the air of a man who has to deal gingerly with abundant riches of astonishing variety.

But the most interesting result of this exercise is not a great haul of ideas but, rather, a surprising narrowness of response. The chapter on *Hamlet* concludes by saying that the main issue of the play is whether Hamlet loves his mother or his father. A survey of productions of *Henry V* leads to the single question: "Is this an anti-war play?" Similarly, the debate is centred on "How 'dark' is *Twelfth Night*?" Most surprisingly of all, his discussion of *Measure for Measure* focuses solely on the issue of whether or not Isabella accepts the Duke's proposal of marriage, and how she makes this decision. Little is said about the effect of Lucio in performance, and his relationship to the Duke: Angelo, the Provost, Escalus, Pompey - each a key character - the dramatic structure and the variation of styles within the play, all escape sustained attention. If Berry's single antithetical issues are the only major "meanings" thrown up by a description of "our changing perception of Shakespeare", then either our engagement with these texts is a small matter, or the pursuit of "ideas" and "meanings" as witnessed in productions is not a good way of measuring our perceptions - unless it is conducted with far greater rigour than the scope of this book allows.

A further question is raised specifically by Berry: how far does the "social cognition" of a particular time and

place condition how Shakespeare's plays are perceived? He suggests that changes in the way certain roles are performed or the plays are staged are due to real-life events - Suez, the occupation of Hungary, pay-restraint and so forth - and to the actions of real people - de Gaulle, Churchill, Adenauer. But these matters are treated lightly.

For a fuller explanation, we have to go beyond the theatre, and seek an account of English social life; and that is well beyond my scope.

That is true enough, but sufficient references are made to what happens "beyond the theatre" should it not be "before a production"? - for most readers to be led to look for a more consecutive account of them. Even the index fails to help this enquiry.

From the start of this book, Ralph Berry acknowledges that the work of British directors and theatre companies has been the most innovative and rewarding during the period he surveys. He has therefore given most of his attention to Britain, and to the work of the Royal Shakespeare Company in particular. All the evidence he provides suggests that this emphasis is right and that we can also say that during the last ten years the field has become wide open. A reader becomes increasingly aware that the times of miracles, or confidence, are past. The productions that awaken interest are not the most recent: *Hamlet* in 1963-6, *Henry V* in 1964, *Troilus* in 1960 and 1968, *Twelfth Night* in 1958 and 1969, and so on. Why are the 1970s barren in comparison? What do more recent productions lack? This book gives rise to these questions but cannot begin to provide considered or properly grounded answers.

The Hogarth Press has recently published *A Month in the Country* by Ivan Turgenev, in Isaiah Berlin's translation which was commissioned by the National Theatre. (127pp. £5.50. 0 7012 0540 7). This edition contains the complete text of the play, a shortened version was performed in 1981 - an appendix giving the passages excised by the censor and an introduction by Isaiah Berlin. Peter Gill's production of *A Month in the Country* at the Olivier Theatre was reviewed in the TLS on February 27, 1981.

Drama for workers

By Harold Hobson

JOHN MCGRATH:
A Good Night Out
Popular Theatre: Audience, Class and Form
126pp. Eyre Methuen. £3.95.
0 413 49330 X

This racy, idiosyncratic book consists of half a dozen lectures which John McGrath delivered at Cambridge in 1979. They draw a very useful distinction between political theatre and popular theatre. Political theatre is on the side of the workers all right, but it "expresses itself in the language of high cultural theatre". Now Mr McGrath is himself a highly cultured man, and is by no means ready to mount a full-scale attack on literary civilization. But he loses few opportunities to get in a smart side-kick at its pretensions. In almost his first word, he reveals a sly joy that at the moment when he was speaking, Bernard Levin was out of a job. He talks of our "cut-price" product, Harold Pinter. He seems annoyed that Pinter should get away with writing a play backwards, and is angered by the prospect of seeing John Osborne "yapping" away against the Trade Unions.

Political theatre is the stuff written ages ago by Brecht and today by Edward Brenton and David Hare. It is a series of sermons, full of sound doctrine for the workers; so much McGrath finds himself bound to admit. But the doctrine, he complains, is not preached in a manner that the workers find either comprehensible or amusing. What working man, he asks, is going to waste his time watching a group of actors putting down a marquee, and then taking it down again? (Over and over again one is amazed at the philistinism of these lectures. David Storey's *The Contractor* is about much more than putting up a tent and then dismantling it. It is about the heartbreak of a working-class father who no longer understands his son who has been to Oxford; it leads directly into *Home*;

it is founded in as deep and echoing an ancestral poetry as McGrath, in his best plays, sometimes touches.)

Nevertheless, there is something in his inessential distaste for the English Stage Company's method of dealing with the British working man. There is an air of condescension about it which one never found in Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop, which McGrath rightly admires. His analysis of popular culture is illuminating, and explains much about the companies he has himself founded under the general title of 784. Working-class audiences have different tastes from the middle class, and it is upon these tastes that working-class theatre should be built. Working-class audiences, McGrath says, like to know what is happening; they are pleased if the story is enlivened by pop songs or other kinds of music; they demand rapid action; they want scene to follow scene without elaborate naturalistic explanation of the sequence of events; they want the play to have an immediate relationship to themselves and their problems; they want simplicity, energy and vigour rather than elaborate plotting; they want a strong story that never loses its grip. By absorbing these influences, by feeling the effects of pantomimes, pirotto shows and rock concerts, McGrath has himself written a series of plays, from *Wind in the Trees* and *Yobbo Now!* to *The Catch* (presented at this year's Edinburgh Festival), which have been performed to large working-class audiences, but, alas, also given pleasure to the middle classes as well.

Frindall's statistics demonstrate however, that the ancient cricket test has today not in the least lost its ebb and flow of the county championship. In the past twenty years, the following records have been broken: the highest fourth innings total without loss; most runs in a day by both teams; the greatest number of bowlers used in a match; six batsmen similarly dismissed in succession in an innings; the fastest fifty; the second fastest hundred; the fastest century; the most runs in a day; the highest second-wicket partnership; the most catches by one fielder in an innings. None of these events occurred in Test cricket, whose immense proliferation in recent years, not explained only by Pakistan's elevation to Test status in 1952, can best be seen from the fact that whereas it

Mr McGrath is a brilliant reporter as well as analyst. His dismantling of the Royal Court's claim to have changed theatrical audiences is very skillful, and his account of a popular concert in a Manchester suburb has the sinister detail of a L. E. Carr or a Graham Greene. Coming from the man who conceived the scene in *The Catch* - almost as sentimental as J. M. Barrie - where a girl from Lancashire in the light of the setting sun is transformed into another. Mary Rose, *A Good Night Out* carries with it an unexpectedly tarting tone,

مكتبة الأصل